The New Criterion

May 1988

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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Volume 6, Number 9

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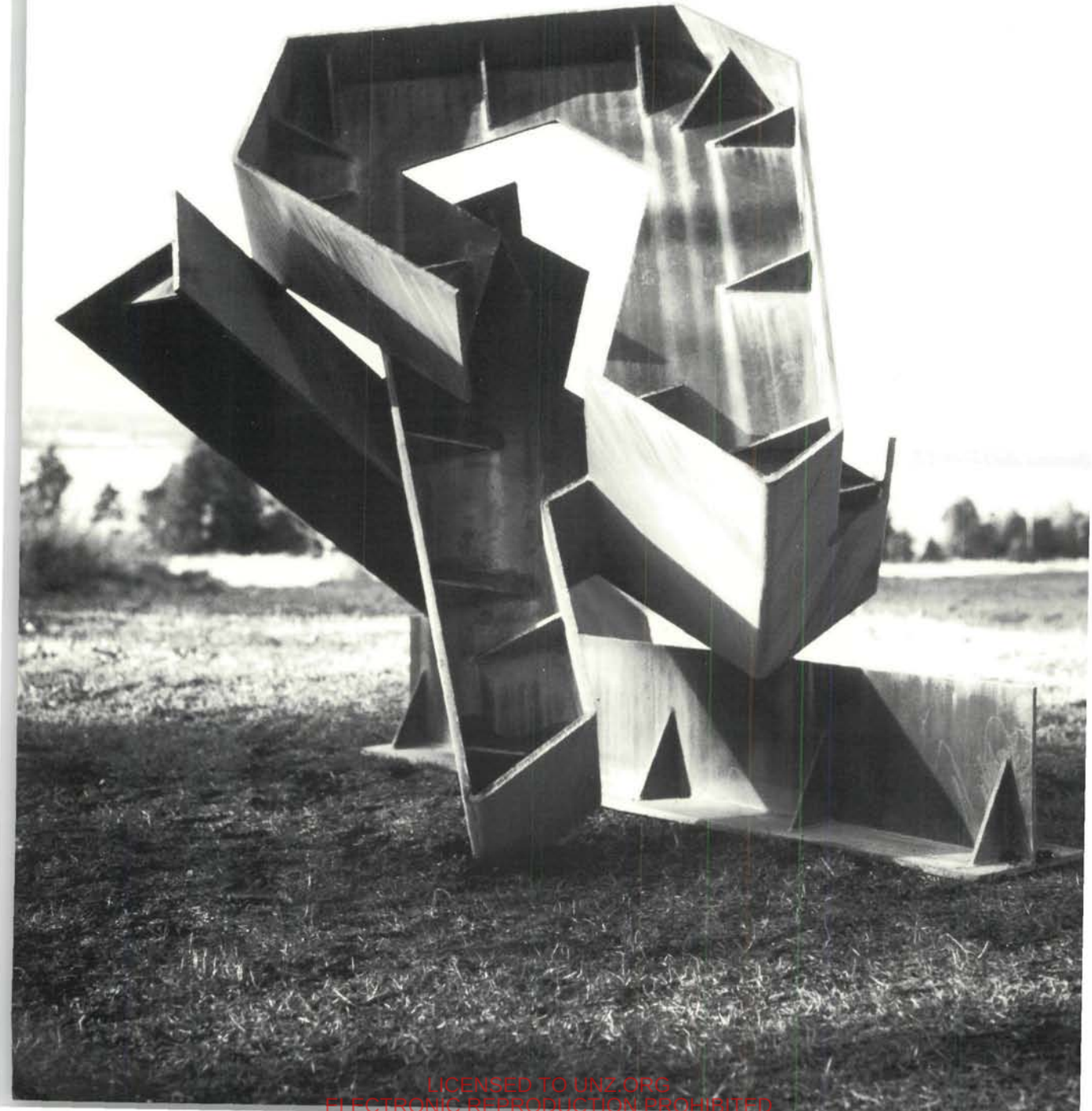

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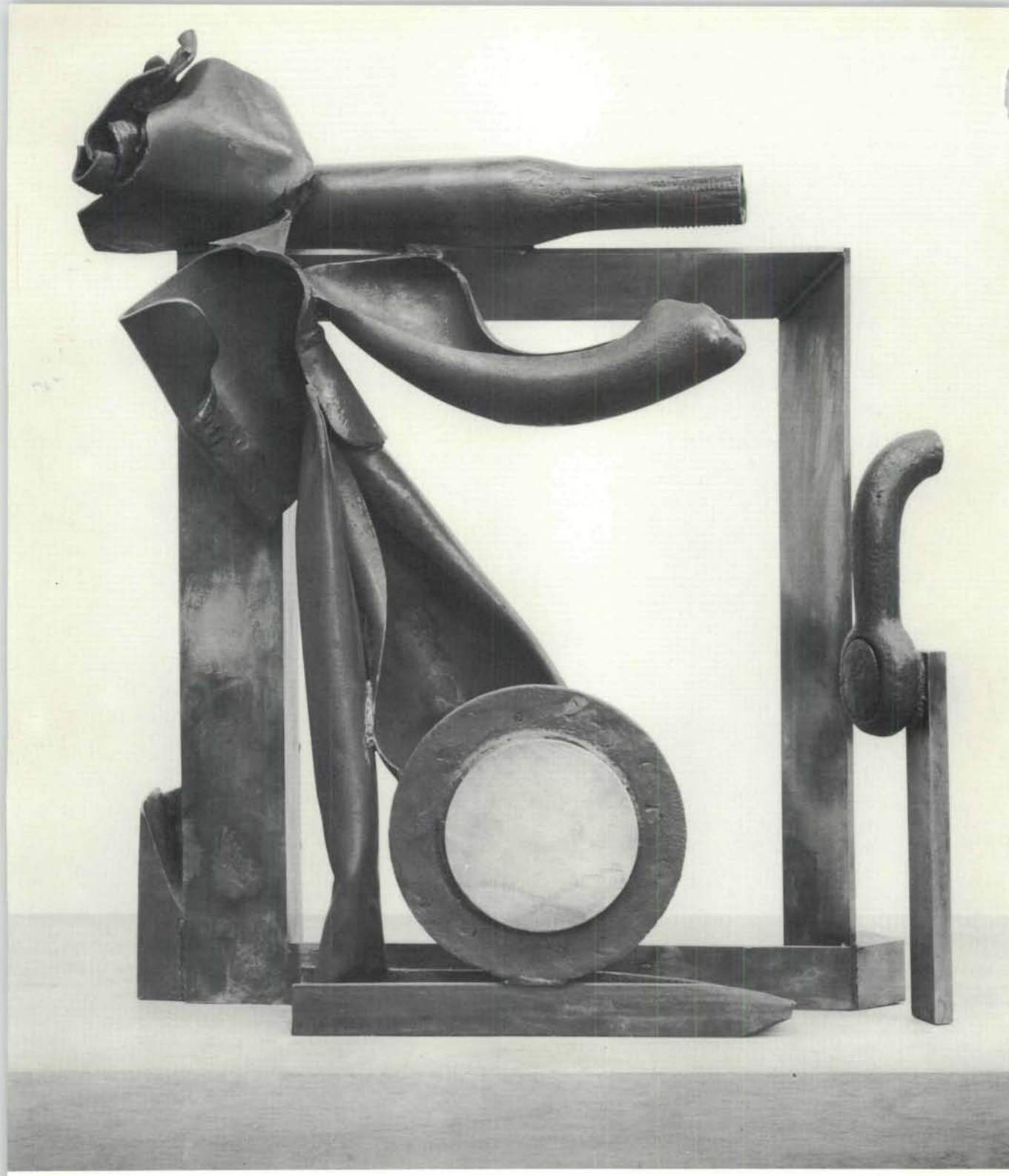

ANTHONY CARO's recent sculpture will be shown from April 30 through June 10. Entitled *The Greek Series*, the exhibition will include the work shown above, *Knave's Measure*, 1987, waxed steel, 46½" high × 39" × 16". A complete catalogue with an essay by John Dorsey is available at $10 from the André Emmerich Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, New York 10022. Telephone (212) 752-0124.

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The New Criterion *May 1988*

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Contributors to this issue

Louis Auchincloss's new novel, *The Golden Calves,* will be published this month by Houghton Mifflin.

Margaret Barringer has appeared in *American Poetry Review* and *Tamarisk.*

Bradley W. Bloch reviewed Imre Salusinszky's *Criticism in Society* for our March issue.

W. S. Di Piero contributed "Notes on Photography" to our October 1987 issue.

Richard Foerster's poems have appeared in *Poetry, The Nation,* and *Southwest Review.*

Rachel Hadas's new collection of poems, *A Son from Sleep,* was recently published by Wesleyan.

Dan Hofstadter wrote on Van Gogh for the March 1987 issue of *The New Criterion.*

Donald Justice is the author of *The Sunset Maker* (Atheneum).

Roger Kimball wrote on MOMA's "Contemporary Art in Context" program for our April issue.

Jed Perl writes on art for *The New Criterion* and other publications.

Eva Resnikova writes regularly on dance for *The New York Observer* and *The New Criterion.*

Edward Shils is Professor of Social Thought and Sociology at the University of Chicago and Honorary Fellow of Peterhouse, Cambridge University. The essay in this issue is adapted from his introduction to *Political Passages,* edited by John H. Bunzel. The book will be published by The Free Press later this month.

Deborah Solomon is the author of *Jackson Pollock: A Biography* (Simon & Schuster).

Diana Trilling, the distinguished critic, is at work on a book about her late husband, Lionel Trilling.

Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Publication Number ISSN 0734-0222. May 1988, Volume 6, Number 9. Subscriptions: $32 for one year, $60 for two. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

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U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road, Sandusky, OH 44870. English distribution by Periodicals in Particular, London NW1. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of issue date.
Advertising representative: Kate Shanley, 521 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10175. (718) 729-6221.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

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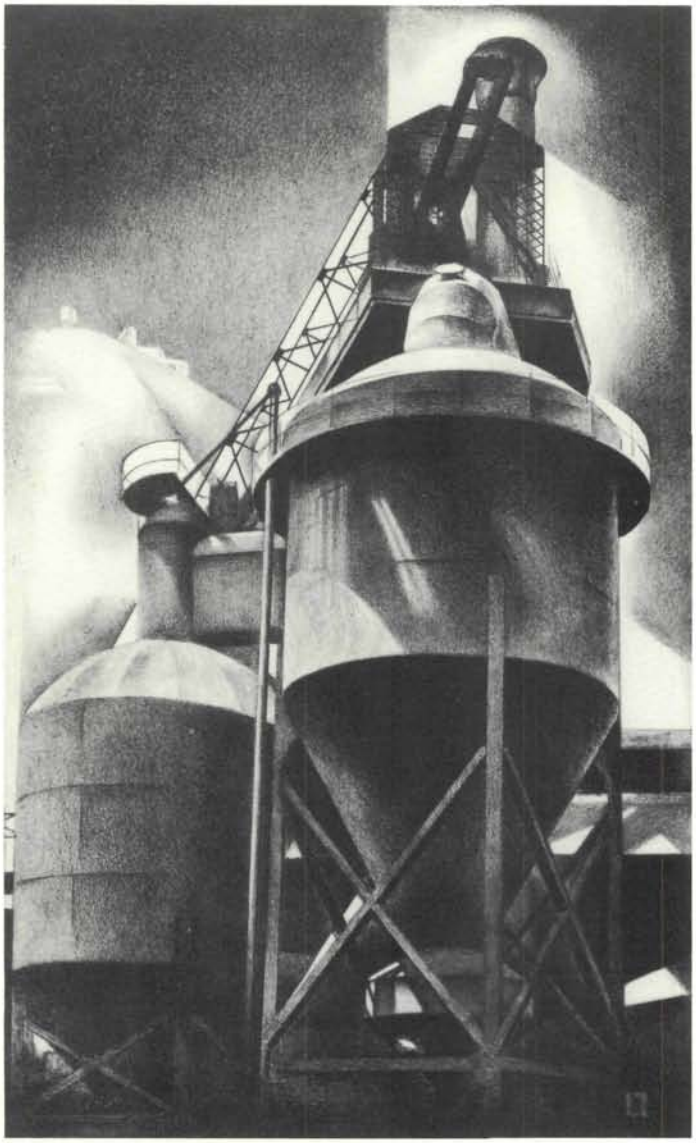

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Whittaker Chambers & "Witness": an exchange

by Diana Trilling & Hilton Kramer

In our issue for March 1988, The New Criterion *published an article called "Thinking about 'Witness'" by Hilton Kramer. In the course of Mr. Kramer's discussion of Whittaker Chambers's* Witness, *he made extensive reference to the writings which Diana Trilling and the late Lionel Trilling had devoted to Chambers and the Hiss case. On some matters the article was in essential agreement with the Trillings' views. But questions were nonetheless raised and certain criticisms made in regard to an essay Mrs. Trilling had written on the Hiss case in 1950. As a courtesy to Mrs. Trilling, we invited her to reply to these criticisms if she wished to do so, and we are pleased to publish her letter here together with Mr. Kramer's response. We much appreciate the fact that Mrs. Trilling has taken time from her current literary endeavors to respond to Mr. Kramer's article. Whatever our disagreements may be on this subject, or indeed on others, her thoughtful comments remind us that nowadays we do not hear from her often enough on the outstanding political and cultural questions of the day. It is certainly to be hoped that when she completes the memoirs on which she is now at work she will once again address herself to the kind of critical tasks to which she has in the past brought so much vigor and distinction.—The Editors*

Letter from Diana Trilling

To the Editors:

Thank you for your invitation to reply to Hilton Kramer's article on Whittaker Chambers. I shall try to be brief in my comments.

In a piece whose whole purpose is political, it is strange that Mr. Kramer differentiates as he does between Lionel Trilling's response to the Hiss case and mine. While he notes Lionel's "remarkable courage" in refusing to testify against Chambers and can manage even to forgive him his personal reservations about the author of *Witness,* he calls me to account for the wrong import of my essay, "A Memorandum on the Hiss Case" (*Partisan Review,* 1950; *Claremont Essays,* 1964). In the long years of our marriage Lionel and I had few political disagreements and the Hiss case was certainly not one of them. Both of us were made uneasy by Chambers's taste for histrionism and—more—by the extreme to which he was led by his Communist convictions. But we believed that he was telling the truth about Hiss. My confidence in the truth of the charges that he brought against Hiss made the basis of my discussion of the case.

If I ask myself why Mr. Kramer reads us this differently, an answer proposes itself—he is not, after all, the first neoconservative to smile upon Lionel while frowning upon me. Does Mr. Kramer want to co-opt him as a Founding Father? It should be obvious not only from the Preface to *The Liberal Imagination,* where he makes it plain that in criticizing liberalism he does so from within its own camp, but also from the whole body of his work with its explicit and implicit resis-

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tance to ideology and its emphasis upon flexibility and modulation of thought, that he doesn't fit the mold. The neoconservatives, by the way, are not alone in wanting to put a sanitizing distance between Lionel and me. Years ago the good-liberal Alfred Kazin urgently addressed him: "When are you going to dissociate yourself from the politics of that wife of yours?"

So far as Chambers is concerned, I do have a post-trial disagreement with Lionel which I am glad to have this opportunity to record. In the new introduction to *The Middle of the Journey* Lionel described him as "a man of honor." In my opinion, no one is a man of honor who betrays his country and spies for a foreign power. It is to Chambers's credit that he renounced his political past, and surely he was not to be made an object of permanent distrust because of his former allegiance. But just as the heroic element in his recantation did not make him a hero, the renunciation of his past does not make him an honorable man, however honorable its motive and method. We have only to contemplate the nature of the activities in which he must have engaged as a Soviet agent to have the impropriety of the designation borne in upon us.

I never argued this with Lionel and I cannot of course know what view he might have come to on further thought. But from my knowledge of him, I venture the guess that he might have amended the words he used.

Mr. Kramer improvises a three-part summary of my Hiss essay in which he quotes me as follows:

> If we can say, as I think we can, that before this century the source of all political idealism was (however remotely) religion, I think we can also say that in our own century the source of all political idealism has been socialism, and, since the Russian Revolution, specifically the socialism of the Soviet Union. I do not mean that whoever has worked for political progress has necessarily been a socialist. I mean only that it has been from socialist theory that political progress has chiefly taken its inspiration, and from socialist example its practice.

Although Mr. Kramer acknowledges the historical truth of this statement, he is struck by "its bland, untroubled acceptance" of the historic situation. What would he have me do: scream at history? Not only the whole of my Hiss essay but the whole of my career as a writer on politics has been a protest against the direction to which its deference to the Soviet Union has carried the political idealism of our time.

It is evident that what actually troubles Mr. Kramer is the fact that while I say that religion was the source of political idealism in an earlier century, I fail to lament its loss in this century. He writes: "Socialism indeed supplanted religion as the source of 'political idealism' and from that fateful shift there had flowed many of the horrors of the modern age." No doubt. But he must perhaps be reminded that throughout recorded history religion has also been the source of its own horrors; and this continues into our own day. Would Mr. Kramer give his support to the religiously motivated Khomeini regime in Iran or even to the movements of religious fundamentalism in America now? The absence of religious faith is surely no guarantee of political soundness but neither is the presence of religious faith a guarantee of political soundness or even of political decency.

And no more is it a guarantee of literary distinction. The fact that religion is at the heart of *Witness* does not, in my opinion, make it the literary masterpiece that Mr. Kramer thinks it is. Chambers's book is unquestionably an interesting and important historical document. It proposes the consideration of useful questions on the relation of religion and politics. But it is too heavy with religiosity to be a major work of autobiography.

I have but a few other brief comments. Mr. Kramer is in error in saying that "owing to the use that Lionel Trilling made of Chambers in creating the character of Gifford Maxim in his novel, *The Middle of the Journey,* he had become an issue . . . even in advance of the Hiss case." Chambers was not at all an "issue" before the Hiss case,

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nor was he identified as a character in *The Middle of the Journey* until well after the trials.

Mr. Kramer also writes: "In the court of liberal opinion, informing on a fellow conspirator was deemed to be a greater crime than belonging to a clandestine spy apparatus and stealing government documents for a foreign power." I find this a remarkable formulation. Mr. Kramer apparently forgets that Chambers not only informed on Hiss but was himself, like Hiss, a Communist spy.

Again, Mr. Kramer is mistaken in saying that the publication of *Witness* fundamentally altered the terms of the political and intellectual debate that had been raging within the liberal camp. The book had no such impact. What it chiefly accomplished was to confirm the already confirmed. It was McCarthyism that lastingly, disastrously, with international effect, changed the intellectual-political culture of this century.

Diana Trilling
New York City

Reply from Hilton Kramer

Of the several issues to be addressed in Mrs. Trilling's letter, the one most easily answered is the claim that it was somehow the intention of my article to suggest that there was, as between her view of Whittaker Chambers and that of her late husband, a significant and divisive difference. Frankly, it had never occurred to me that such a difference might have existed, and I believe there is nothing in my article to support such an assumption. As far as I know, the first evidence of such a difference of opinion is to be found—as Mrs. Trilling herself acknowledges—in the letter we are publishing here. In recording her dissent from Lionel Trilling's judgment of Chambers as "a man of honor," it is Mrs. Trilling—not the author of "Thinking about 'Witness'"—who has introduced this difference of opinion as an issue for discussion.

It must also be said in this connection that Mrs. Trilling's "guess," as she puts it, that "on further thought" Lionel Trilling might have "amended the words he used" about Chambers, is not very persuasive. The new introduction to *The Middle of the Journey* was, after all, one of the last essays Lionel Trilling completed before his death in 1975. For more than a quarter of a century, he had been in a position to ponder the question of Chambers and his honor, and the words he used in re-affirming his judgment on this question do not seem to leave much room for amendment. "I should like to think that my having said that Chambers and I were not friends will lend the force of objectivity to my statement, the substance of which I would still affirm," Trilling wrote. "Whittaker Chambers had been engaged in espionage against his own country; when a change of heart and principle led to his defecting from his apparatus, he had eventually not only confessed his own treason but named the comrades who shared it, including one whom for a time he had cherished as a friend. I hold that when this has been said of him, it is still possible to say that he was a man of honor."

All of us, I suppose, would like to believe that we are in perfect agreement with those nearest and dearest to us on all questions of great importance, but it sometimes happens that we are not. Again, it is Mrs. Trilling who has now called our attention to the fact that on this particular issue she did not agree with her husband's judgment.

It is not, in any case, because I suspected that this difference of opinion separated the Trillings that I felt it important to recall their separate writings on Chambers and the Hiss case. I discussed their essays because I believe that in their separate and quite different ways they wrote about this fateful historical episode with a keener understanding of its significance than many of their contemporaries. It was, moreover, specifically within the context of the "debate among disabused liberals over the future of liberalism" that I placed their work on this subject. Far from any attempt to enlist Lionel Trilling as "a Founding Father" of neoconservatism, or

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indeed, of any other variety of conservatism, I expressly called attention to his attachment to liberalism. "Since he believed himself, with just reason, to be writing as a liberal," I wrote, "Trilling was said to have been considerably shaken when Joseph Frank wrote an article in *The Sewanee Review,* in 1956, entitled 'Lionel Trilling and the Conservative Imagination.'"

About the exact relation in which Lionel Trilling's writings may be thought to stand to the emergence of the neoconservative position, there is, of course, much to be said. It is, indeed, an extremely interesting question—interesting, above all, because it clearly does not lend itself to the kind of closed, categorical answer that Mrs. Trilling is so eager to offer us. This was not in fact the subject I was writing about in my essay on *Witness,* and the present occasion is obviously not an appropriate one in which to attempt a comprehensive account of it. But since Mrs. Trilling has raised the issue, I am obliged to say that I do not think the subject can be as easily disposed of as she would have us believe. It would make nonsense of Lionel Trilling's work to deny that he was "criticizing liberalism . . . from within its own camp," and there was nothing in my article to suggest, even by indirection, such a denial. But it is, as Mrs. Trilling should know, part of the complexity of Lionel Trilling's thought—and this goes for the complex fate of his influence, too—that when one has said that he wrote as a liberal, one has said only the first thing and by no means the last thing that needs to be said about the subject. In this matter, too, there is surely room for some "flexibility and modulation of thought." To think otherwise, as Mrs Trilling suggests we should, is to diminish the scope of Lionel Trilling's ideas.

It was, however, not about Lionel Trilling but about *Witness* and its reception among the liberals—especially liberal anti-Communists like Lionel and Diana Trilling—that my article was largely concerned. It was in this connection that I dwelt at some length on Mrs. Trilling's "Memorandum on the Hiss Case," which, though it was written two years before the publication of *Witness,* still seemed in retrospect to embody—in its defects as well as in its many virtues—so much of the political and moral substance of the liberal anti-Communist response to Chambers and his views. The key passage in Mrs. Trilling's essay to which I called attention is indeed the one she cites in her letter—the passage in which she spoke of the way socialism had supplanted religion as the source of "political idealism" in our time. When I observed that "Mrs. Trilling did not pause to consider [the] implications" of this "fateful shift," one of the implications I obviously had in mind—it was spelled out in the next paragraph—concerned the relation that obtained between socialism and liberalism. This, it seemed to me, should have loomed as a crucial issue for liberals like Mrs. Trilling who were so firmly anti-Communist in their political views. They had, as Mrs. Trilling correctly points out in her letter, strongly opposed that "deference to the Soviet Union" which had played so great a role in corrupting the liberal position. But where, precisely, did they stand on the more fundamental issue of socialism? And could liberalism, even a liberalism disencumbered of its allegiance to the Soviet Union, really be revitalized in isolation from the particular kind of political idealism that derived from socialism? It was because all of these questions were passed over in silence in Mrs. Trilling's "Memorandum" that I was moved to make the following observation:

> In what ways the wagon of American liberalism remained firmly attached to the idea of socialism, however, and what *that* meant, was nowhere addressed. It obviously did not occur to Mrs. Trilling—or to the anti-Communist liberals who shared her views—that if socialism remained the source of "political idealism," then liberalism itself might be doomed.

It would appear from Mrs. Trilling's letter that she is no more prepared to address this issue in 1988 than she was in 1950.

"What would he have me do: scream at history?" Mrs. Trilling asks. Well, we've all

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been moved by the horrors of history to raise our voices on occasion, and Mrs. Trilling herself has by no means always been immune to the impulse. There was a time, which some of us vividly remember, when hers was indeed one of the most powerful of the voices raised in the denunciation of Stalinist perfidy. Having since made her peace with the liberals, however, she is nowadays more likely to be found raising her voice against neoconservatism. And in the letter published here, she has not hesitated to raise it against religion—which, it is interesting to note, she seems to have some difficulty distinguishing from that easy target, "religiosity." A writer who, at the very mention of Whittaker Chambers's interest in religion, especially in its relation to political idealism, can respond only by invoking the name of the Khomeini regime in Iran might even be suspected of indulging in a bit of a "scream at history" herself—something she is still, it would seem, disinclined to do when it comes to the relation of liberalism to socialism. What she says about religion and politics is no different, really, from the standard liberal case that was made by Sidney Hook, among others, in his review of *Witness* in 1952. It wasn't a fresh argument then, and the passage of time has done nothing to render it more persuasive.

Between a scream, on the one hand, and total silence, on the other, there is surely a great deal of room for critical discussion—especially on a matter as crucial as the relation of liberalism to socialism. That was what I found missing in Mrs. Trilling's "Memorandum," and it is still missing these many years later. It is because liberals like Mrs. Trilling have refused for so long to engage in such a discussion that I was moved to observe in my article that "as an intellectual tradition liberalism is bankrupt" and, further, that "liberalism dares not openly acknowledge, even to itself, its surrender to socialist ideology." It was, moreover, because Whittaker Chambers was correct as well as audacious in his analysis of the relation of liberalism to socialism that *Witness* could be said to have "fundamentally altered the terms of the political and intellectual debate that had been raging within the liberal camp at least since the Moscow Trials in the Thirties."

It is yet another confirmation of liberalism's intellectual and political decline to find, as one does in Mrs. Trilling's letter, that "It was McCarthyism that lastingly, disastrously, with international effect, changed the intellectual-political culture of this century." There was a time when a liberal of Mrs. Trilling's experience would have been quick to point out that it was Stalin, not Senator McCarthy, who "changed the intellectual-political culture of this century." McCarthyism was a very much smaller political phenomenon—a political phenomenon that owed its existence to, among much else, the liberals' denial of the reality of Communist subversion, and one that was, in any case, terminated by the actions of the United States Senate. We weren't as lucky—and neither was the rest of the world—when it came to Stalinism and its achievements. It is embarrassing to have to remind Diana Trilling, of all people, of this elementary fact of political life; but her letter, with its recourse to the kind of liberal cliché she herself would once have been among the first to expose, makes it necessary to do so. It also moves one to observe that while much has changed in the world since Whittaker Chambers wrote *Witness,* nothing has really changed in the liberal response to this great and indispensable book.

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Totalitarians and antinomians: remembering the 30s & 60s

by Edward Shils

The generation of persons who are now in their forties, as well as some in their early fifties, is not the only one which has had to face the temptations of spurious ideals. Has there ever been a generation since the French Revolution which has not come into the presence of temptation by one body of fallacious ideals or another? In the present century, there has been a continuing series of temptations with all their deceptive allures. My own generation in its youth had its fill of temptations, slightly different from but closely related to the temptations faced by the generation which came of age in the Sixties. It might be interesting to compare the totalitarian temptation which my own generation faced to the antinomian temptation —embodied in a hatred of laws, rules, and institutions—with which the generation of the 1960s and 1970s was confronted.

Of what did the totalitarian temptation consist? It offered the prospect of a society free of conflict and injustice, in which human beings would be rewarded because they were human beings, without regard to superiority or inferiority, without regard to their ancestral religion or their ethnic derivation, and without regard to sexual characteristics. It would be a society in which there would be no power of some human beings over other human beings. The totalitarian temptation offered all the benign qualities of a pacific anarchistic regime, in which there would be no conflict among human beings because there would be no private property and hence no conflicting interests in the acquisition and retention of private property. Since there would be no conflicts of interest among human beings, there would be no suppression of their aspirations. Thus, the first ideal of the totalitarian temptation was a society in which individuals could develop themselves in accordance with their own inclinations. It offered the realization of the anarchistic ideal contained in Marxism.

The totalitarian temptation also offered the prospect of plenitude. Scarcity, it asserted, was an artificial creation of the regime of private property; once the private ownership of property in the means of production was abolished and replaced by "social ownership," scarcity would cease. According to the prospect held out by the totalitarian temptation, the wastefulness of the competitive market would cease once a systematic planning of the entire economic system was put into practice. Planning required a strong central authority which was antithetical to the fundamental anarchistic ideal of the totalitarian temptation.

There was a third and distinctive feature of the totalitarian temptation. This was the concentration of power and authority in the government and in the political party which dominated the government and which excluded all other parties from attempting to accede to power. This concentration entailed a monopoly of the public expression of opinion on all problems thought to bear on

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politics. It meant that there could be no autonomous collectivities in the totalitarian society, other than the single party which ruled it.

A fourth feature of the totalitarian temptation was the importance attributed to the industrial working class, the real interests of which were allegedly pursued and protected by the totalitarian party.

The totalitarian temptation entered Western Europe and the United States as an emanation of the Russian Revolution of October 1917. In the United States, it drew to itself in the 1920s very few persons. It gained a slight following among literary and artistic intellectuals. It was the arrogation to itself of the anarchistic ideal which attracted these intellectuals, who were a tiny, isolated aggregate in American society in the 1920s. The Communist Party of the United States became the voice of the totalitarian temptation. Before the 1930s, the Communist Party held itself aloof from the intellectuals who espoused the first, emancipationist ideal; its attachment was from the very beginning to the third and fourth articles of the totalitarian faith. It took to heart the second ideal of plenitude through central planning after the promulgation of the First Five Year Plan in the Soviet Union in 1927.

American intellectuals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had been apolitical and antipolitical, constitutional and collectivistic liberals, Darwinian and utilitarian individualistic liberals, traditionalist conservatives, anarchists, radical and populistic democrats, and scientistic collectivists. Very few of them imagined a totalitarian solution to what they conceived to be the problems of American and European societies. In the opening years of the fourth decade of this century, however, a pronounced change took place. Intellectuals embraced all of the four ideals which together made up the totalitarian temptation.

I reached majority around that time, so I was very much exposed to this way of thinking. But I never became a Communist or a fellow traveller. Since the country was being stampeded by Communists and fellow travellers from about 1930, when I was in my twenties, I will reflect briefly on why and how I withstood the crush.

My parents, who were self-respecting, industrious, and prudent persons, were not educated at all by contemporary standards. My father must have gone to a Talmud Torah in Russia for a few years. This experience was well behind him when he arrived in the United States sometime in the second half of the 1890s, at the age of seventeen. He was fortunate enough to find employment in a cigar factory shortly after his arrival in Philadelphia. He remained a cigar maker for the rest of his working life. My mother was about six or seven when she came to Philadelphia; she attended a public school for about three years, where she was apparently a very good pupil and much esteemed by her teachers. She had to leave school in order to contribute to the support of her widowed mother and her younger brothers; one older brother and several sisters were already at work in various branches of the garment industry.

Like most of the poor Jews recently arrived from Eastern Europe, my parents had a very high regard for education, although they had had very little of it themselves. My father was probably vaguely a socialist, at least in his sympathies, although he never belonged to any socialist party. He read the *Daily Forward* in Yiddish from time to time, but he was not much interested in politics. Politics were never discussed at home by my parents or their friends and relatives. My one uncle, on my mother's side, who was intemperately against the bosses, was neither a socialist nor a Communist. He was thought by his brothers and sisters to be unpleasant, and although he was the patriarch of that side of the family, he was regarded as too uncivil in his opinions.

My father had many friends among cigar makers of very diverse national origins, and they often came to visit us on Sunday afternoons. For the most part, they spoke about their boyhood in "the old country" or about their fellow cigar makers, about the cigar-

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making business, about their own kinsmen and their adventures, and other such topics. None of them read books.

My mother was better informed, since she read English very well, but she too took no interest in politics. She read the novels of Zola, Turgenev, Zangwill, and Tolstoy (at least *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Anna Karenina*), as well as short-story writers. She was a great reader of Theodore Dreiser, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, and Katherine Mansfield.

When I was ten years old, my parents purchased for me, on the installment plan, the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* which I still possess and use frequently. There were no other books in our home except for those which I used to purchase for five or ten cents from Leary's Bookstore—a great secondhand bookshop in Philadelphia.

Of course, I knew about the Soviet Union; it would have been impossible not to know about it if one read newspapers. My mother's eldest brother had returned to Russia early in the century, and there was much worry about his fate after the Revolution. Neither of my parents had an interest in the Soviet Union or a liking for it. It was thought to be a place where, despite the prominence of Jews in the revolutions, the Jews continued to have a very hard time. It was certainly not thought of in my family as the "workers' fatherland." In my boyhood, I shared those attitudes, which were a mixture of uninterestedness and distaste.

Of my immediate relatives of my own generation, who were numerous, only one had gone to university before I did, and not many followed. The few who followed mainly studied medicine, although one studied commerce and made a good name for himself as a teacher at the University of Pennsylvania. There was one very remote kinsman on my father's side who had gone to Germany before the First World War to study philosophy. He was a legendary figure; I never met him.

When I was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania, I read very widely. I became interested in sociology of the sort practiced by Max Weber. I was also greatly attracted by Sombart's writings, especially *Die Juden und das Wirschaftsleben, Der moderne Kapitalismus,* and especially *Der proletarische Sozialismus.* The latter was perhaps the first large German book I read through from beginning to end. Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* and Troeltsch's *Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Sekten,* about which I learned from Tawney and Weber, likewise attracted me. In this connection I also tried to understand the Marxist approach to the origins of modern capitalism and read the historical parts of Marx. I discovered by accident Bukharin's *Historical Materialism.* I found him very cheeky and schematic, but I was impressed by the fact that he had written it while engaged in the political intrigues of the Bolshevik Party in the early 1920s.

My one cousin who had gone to university—he was a son of the intemperate uncle—graduated the year before I did. He attached himself to me, *faute de mieux,* and we became uneasy friends. He had acquired a censorious view of bourgeois society from his father, and he had a certain cynical and contemptuous sympathy with Communism.

I had always been an explorer of the great city. Ever since I was ten years of age, I had gone alone every Sunday for long walks in the different districts and neighborhoods of Philadelphia. When my cousin attached himself to me, I continued my walks but also, on his initiative, I used to go to a Communist "forum" on Sunday evenings, where I heard most of the leading Communists of the time, not only W. Z. Foster, Earl Browder, Benjamin Gitlow, Max Bedacht, Robert Minor, Robert Dunn, and Scott Nearing but also Max Schachtman and others of that ilk. They proclaimed the near-perfection of man's condition in the Soviet Union. I had a rather detached attitude about all that. If I had any politics in those days, they were the politics of H. L. Mencken.

At the beginning of these frequentations, I was not as distrustful toward the Soviet

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Union as I later became. It was perhaps the Industrial Party and Metro-Vickers trials—two of the early show trials in the Soviet Union, in 1930 and 1933—which set me on my guard against the rulers of the Soviet Union and their tired and dusty American missionaries.

The deposition, exile, and denunciation of Trotsky, while not winning my sympathy for him, convinced me definitely that there must be something amiss in the Soviet Union. A minor incident which came to my attention in about 1931 sharpened this impression of Communist baseness.

On Sunday evenings, we had a sort of *Stammtisch* at Horn and Hardart's on South Broad Street. It was there that I heard about the misfortunes of two young men—I think one of them was named Leon Goodman. I cannot recall the name of the other; he wore a "Lenin cap" and obviously regarded himself as having a high calling as a revolutionary. These two young men were soft-mannered Jews who had been Communists and then became Trotskyists. They had graduated from my high school, the great Philadelphia Central High School, a few years before me, so that must have singled me out for their attention. I did not know them at school. They must have also heard about my denunciations at the *Stammtisch* of the Communists who were the authors of their misfortunes.

One evening they came over to our table, perhaps—correctly—thinking that I would be sympathetic to their melancholy story. It was this: attempting to win over to Trotskyism some homeless men quartered in the disused Brill Locomotive Works at Broad and Spring Garden Streets, they were brutally knocked about by some Communist partisans who were attempting to win the adherence of the same down-and-outers. The one who wore the Lenin cap was nearly blinded by a splinter of glass from his spectacles, which had been broken by the attackers. Their story, added to the "trials" and the morally scruffy impression of the Communist leaders whom I had heard at the "forum," finished off the Communists as far as I was concerned. After that I could not accept anything done by Communists as virtuous or anything said by them as true.

At about the same time, the theory of "social fascism" was making the rounds; it was an obviously dishonest fabrication. I placed some of the blame for the accession of Hitler to power in Germany on the German Communist Party. The 1930s were one continuous exhibition of the hateful and arrogant ignorance of the Communists until the Seventh Congress, and of their patent hypocrisy thereafter. I followed their misdeeds closely throughout that decade and have done so ever since. In the winter of 1934, I presented a paper on "Communism as a Social Movement" in Robert Park's seminar on "collective behavior" at the University of Chicago. For that paper, I read the *Daily Worker* from about 1927 onward; I also read carefully and benefited a lot from *Die Geschichte des Bolschewismus* by Arthur Rosenberg, a historian who had separated himself from the Communists after a long attachment. I also learned a lot from Waldemar Gurian's *Der Bolschewismus.* Both of these books and their authors are now forgotten; they should not be, since they were among the first to say what Communism was. (I should include here Bertrand Russell's *Theory and Practice of Bolshevism.* That too helped to settle the matter.)

"The 1930s were one continuous exhibition of the hateful and arrogant ignorance of the Communists until the Seventh Congress, and of their patent hypocrisy thereafter."

In 1932, my brother, who had graduated in engineering and who was always more idealistic than I was, took employment as an engineer in the Soviet Union; he spent about four years there. He returned to the United States in about 1936. While there,

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he acquired a fluent mastery of Russian and an affection for his Russian colleagues and subordinates. What he told me about the Communist Party officials of the several parts of the Soviet Union where he worked, and about the bureaucrats of the ministry with which he had to deal, gave me additional ground for refusing to believe anything said by the American Communists who always praised the Soviet Union as the one progressive force in the world.

I must add here that I was never a socialist either. I regretted the decision of the Bolsheviks to break the Second International. I certainly found offensive, for its trivial vilifications, Lenin's criticism of the "renegade Kautsky," whom I regarded as a probably quite boring but honorable person and certainly no more of an "enemy" of the working classes than Lenin himself. I had more sympathy for Eduard Bernstein's criticism of Marxism, but I did not find his book on the presuppositions of Marxism very persuasive. His personal account of his years of exile in England was much more to my taste. Nevertheless, I had a feeling of sympathy with social democrats in Europe, and I continue to do so, even though I think that their ideas are wrong. They were clearly not such villains as the Communists. Henry de Man's *Zur Psychology des Marxismus,* Robert Michels's *Political Parties,* above all Sombart's *Der proletarische Sozialismus* gave me a very skeptical perspective about socialist ideas. I also rather enjoyed Pareto's *Systèmes socialistes* for the sharpness of its criticism and its mocking attitude. Georges Sorel was, in general, more interesting to me than any other famous socialist and Communist writer. I appreciated the primordial moralism of *Le Procès de Socrate* and his belief, equally unusual for a socialist, in redemption through the collectively transcendent experience of *la grève générale,* or general strike. It was from studying Sorel that I learned the tradition of socialism was a historically accidental collocation of diverse elements which did not belong together with logical necessity. It was tradition rather than reason which held them together.

In the 1930s I met very few socialists. The handful of socialists at the University in Pennsylvania were very flimsy intellectually. There was only one of them who was of good character and who knew anything at all. His name was Sidney Sufrin; he was a practical socialist who was a partisan of economic planning. He had no interest in Marxism or in continental social democracy; he was very much inclined toward Fabian socialism. He was a very intelligent young man, rather moody; we did not often talk about politics, although I do recall one argument which we had about planning. This must have been in 1931, when the fanaticism for the accomplishments of the Soviet Union was just beginning; he did not share it, although I do remember his friend Maynard Krueger, who taught economics at the University of Pennsylvania, explaining away Communist tyranny as a necessary condition of economic progress. (How often I heard that same argument years later on behalf of the tyrannies of the new states of Africa after they gained their independence!)

Sidney Sufrin was very enthusiastic about the University of Chicago and especially about Frank Knight, the famous economist —Sidney had been a research assistant in economics there the preceding year. With his encouragement and help, I came to Chicago in the autumn of 1932 with the intention of studying sociology and economic history; I had read fairly widely in these two subjects while an undergraduate, but never formally. I had studied Romance languages and literature when I was an undergraduate, and I intended to improve the study of nineteenth-century literature by applying to it the ideas of Weber and Dilthey; Georg Brandes was a hero of mine, a genuine "good European," whose *Main Currents of European Literature in the Nineteenth Century* I wished to emulate and improve in a more sociological way. But since I had to support myself in Chicago, I obtained an appointment as a social worker in the Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare. I was responsible—after a fashion—for about eight hundred Negro families. I learned a great deal

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from my "clients" by this rather intense experience. I acquired a very warm feeling for them and regarded them as a brave and upright people who maintained their dignity under adverse circumstances. In consequence of this experience, I could not but see straightaway the nonsense of the program of a "black republic," on which James Allen (*né* Solomon Auerbach) was a leading authority. I knew that the Communists were seeking to exploit the Negroes for their own purposes, using some not very high-grade decoys like James Ford and Harry Haywood. They did not succeed. How could they have succeeded? The poor Negroes whom the Communists were hoping to ensnare were surely uneducated, but they were shrewd enough to be utterly indifferent to the appeal to "Defend the Chinese Soviets." That was one of the demands displayed on the placards at a demonstration organized by the Communist-dominated Unemployed Council in front of the building where my branch of the County Bureau of Public Welfare had its offices. (I also saw with abhorrence the brutality with which the police broke up the pathetically small demonstration.)

How could one have any respect for a movement so crudely unrealistic, untruthful, and manipulative? I will not go into the murderous dishonesty of the Moscow trials, which only the deliberately blind and the knowingly hypocritical could have said were justly initiated and fairly conducted. It was not only my reading about the monumental untruthfulness and cruelty, usually treated very indulgently in *The New York Times, The Nation,* and *The New Republic,* which put me off this "one great hope of mankind." It was also my own immediate experiences and my own close observation of Communists, with whom I had many contacts in the 1930s and very early 1940s.

Although Albert Walgreen, the owner of a chain of drugstores in Chicago, had instigated an investigation by a legislative committee into Communist activities at the University of Chicago, Communists and Communist activities were negligible there in the 1930s. It was not that the Communists did not wish to make mischief; there were simply too few of them to do so.

One among them, whom I came to know very well, was by nature a mischief-maker. He was Frank Meyer, a demonic figure with flashing black eyes and a mop of black hair before mops on the head became the fashion; he was shabby in dress, eloquent, voluble, excitable, a young man from a prosperous family in northern New Jersey by way of Oxford and the London School of Economics, from which he had been expelled. He was nominally a graduate student in anthropology, but his time was spent in agitation. He was very far from stupid—in fact he was rather bright—and he had his charms, but he certainly had no interest in learning anthropology. I came to know him quite well because he attended a course given by Louis Wirth, to whom I was an assistant. In that course, he frequently interrupted Wirth's fluent discourses with Marxist corrections, supplements, and reinterpretations. I knew more about Marx than he did and was no less forward, so that after a time he decided that I knew more than he did and that knowing so much about Marx and Lenin—in fact it was not very much but it was more than he knew—I must be sympathetic to Communism. It was inconceivable to him that one could know the writings of Marx, Engels, and Lenin without being on their side. This latter error did not last very long; his more fundamental error lasted nearly ten years longer.

Once Meyer ceased to serve as educational director of the Communist Party in the state of Illinois, he became a zealous, regular, and much valued contributor to *National Review.* In the final years of his life he became a prominent and deadly serious libertarian. Some years before he ceased being a Communist and long after I had last seen him—I last saw him at a street corner near the university on the evening when it became clear that the Soviets were about to invade Poland, and he was so despondent that I said to a common acquaintance that I thought that Frank Meyer was reaching the end of his Communist tether—he wrote me

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that his current beliefs were undoubtedly as distasteful to me as his earlier ones had been. That amused me. It was also more or less true.

Despite Frank Meyer's sartorial effects, the Chicago Stalinists of those days were bourgeois gentlemen compared with the antinomians who thirty years later took over most of the heritage of Stalinist totalitarianism, touched it up here and there with a few criticisms, and placed a very heavy emphasis on its recessive antinomian element. Except for Frank Meyer, the Communists at the University of Chicago, who were in any case very few in number, had no outstanding personality. The Trotskyists, or at least the small number of sympathizers with Trotsky, who were as anti-Stalinist as I was but for other reasons, included a handful of gifted young men who later made names for themselves, such as Harold Kaplan, Saul Bellow, Herbert Passin, Isaac Rosenfeld, and Ithiel Pool. They enjoyed the friendship of Nathan Leites, then an instructor in political science, a passionate and extremely well-informed anti-Communist. Leites was certainly not a Trotskyist, but he liked the spirited and literate admirers of Trotsky, who were generally a rather attractive lot. For a time, their brightness was enhanced by the lively and eccentric presence of Lionel Abel. I was friendly with Leites, and the Trotskyists therefore regarded me as not too far from their position. As a matter of fact, I thought that they were rather foolish in their political and social views, but in their general culture and cleverness they were many cuts above the Stalinists.

Thus to the query which several of my students have put to me over the years, as to whether I was a Communist or a sympathizer or a fellow traveller when those variant forms of totalitarian opinion were at the height of their influence, my answer is, of course, negative. I do not claim any credit for this. It did not take any exceptional intelligence, or imagination, or erudition, or strength of character to withstand the totalitarian temptation. One just had to be intelligent and self-respecting enough to withstand prevailing opinions. I had of course the advantages of knowing a little more of European history, of knowing more of Marxism and of better ways of interpreting social phenomena than were given by Marxism, of having a little more of a sense of affinity with the American working class and with the lower classes generally, and of knowing a little more about economics—thanks to Frank Knight—and much more about romanticism and about the tradition of anti-bourgeois bohemianism. I also had the advantage of having found an intellectual direction of my own before the great stampede of the American intellectuals began. Then too I had the advantage of being at the University of Chicago and not at Harvard, Columbia, Wisconsin, Berkeley, or the City College of New York. All those amounted to a considerable advantage when it came to seeing through the intellectually shoddy, arbitrary, and derivative character of Communist theories and policies. I also had the advantage of knowing about Marxism before it became the *dernier cri* of the intellectuals. Furthermore, I have always been repelled by running with the mob. In this respect, not being in New York helped; so did being pigheaded. It took nothing more than a sober eye to size up the brutality and the moral shadiness of Communists, both in the Soviet Union and in Western countries.

Despite the rush of so many Gadarene academics and intellectuals toward the Soviet camp and its outposts in Western Europe and the United States in the 1930s, their defection was on a much smaller scale than the hectic stampede, in a similar but less specific direction, on university campuses in the United States during the 1960s and early 1970s. There was no pressure at all on me at the University of Chicago in the 1930s to "move to the Left." Perhaps at Wisconsin or at the City College of New York, or among the younger teachers at Harvard or Berkeley in that decade, I would have had to resist the pressure of surrounding opinion, but not at the University of Chicago. It was not that there were no

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strong opinions at Chicago. On the contrary, there were many of them—there were neo-Thomists, there were anti-neo-Thomists, there were enthusiasts for the "great books," there were the equally dogmatic antagonists of the "great books," there were collectivistic liberals, there were individualistic liberals, there were the partisans of psychoanalytic interpretations of political activity, there were logical positivists, instrumentalists, there were even a few Christians. All of these views were strongly held. What was true among the teachers was also true among the students, especially the undergraduate students, who were, however, far outnumbered by the graduates.

Marxism had to take its chance among the other contenders, and it was bound by its intellectual limitations not to come off well. Except for Frederick Schuman, who was in the political science department until about 1936 and who was a fairly conventional and not very sharp-witted fellow traveller for some years and later a devotee of L. Ron Hubbard's dianetics nonsense, there were no public fellow travellers. There were a few professors who allowed their names to be used by the Communists in order to gain more dupes. As I remember, Anton Carlson and Ernest Burgess were among the very few whose names appeared in Communist declarations. Burgess was a good, gentle person who was naïve enough to think that sociological research and "social planning" were made for each other. Carlson was an eminent physiologist, a "freethinker" of the old school; he looked and spoke like a Swedish carpenter from the North Side. He "believed in science"; the Communists alleged that they did too, and that was enough for him. I think that there were "Marxist study groups" on the campus, but I was not invited to them, probably because it was thought that I would make too much trouble. No one known to me participated in them except Frank Meyer.

"The highest ideal of antinomianism is a life of complete self-determination . . . . Neither God nor man is to be set over the individual self."

That is the story of why and how I did not yield to the totalitarian temptation between the early 1930s and the middle of the 1950s.

I myself had a much easier time than did the young persons of the 1960s and early 1970s. I was able to resist the totalitarian temptation because I just did not find it tempting. When antinomianism appeared thirty years later, I was not tempted by it either. For one thing, I was too old; that antinomianism was a "young people's thing." But far more important was my certainty that the ideals it pursued were for the most part valueless, that the account which it gave of the world was wrong, and that the motives of those who saw and judged the world according to the antinomian world view were discreditable.

When the antinomian temptation came over the horizon in the 1960s, I did not expect it. But when I saw what it was, it seemed to be little more than a very intensely stirred-up continuation of recent tendencies and older traditions. I had always been opposed to the "cult of the self," skeptical about the romantic belief in the creative potentialities of all human beings. That was armor enough.

The antinomian temptation is an elaboration of certain parts of the totalitarian temptation, with a certain shift in emphasis. It is an advancement of the emancipationist parts to greater saliency and a retraction of other features. The ultimate utopian end—the first article of faith of the totalitarian temptation—is more prominent in antinomianism. At its innermost core resides, first, the fundamental and all-overriding value of the emancipation of the individual from the burden of obligations and, second, the unremitting insistence on his rights. This is the root of the matter. The highest ideal of antinomianism is a life of complete self-determination, free of the burden of tradition and conventions, free of the constraints imposed

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by institutional rules and laws and of the stipulations of authority operating within the setting of institutions. Neither God nor man is to be set over the individual self. (Charismatic authority is acceptable, but rational-legal or traditional authority is utterly repugnant.)

All human beings, according to this view, are entitled to whatever any individual is entitled to. All human beings are entitled to be gratified as the promptings of the self require. Not only are the traditions of individualistic and constitutional liberalism—equality before the law, equality of opportunity, equality of electoral power, equality in the freedom of expression and the representation of interests—negated by this anarchistic liberalism; their postulates are denied. The traditions of individualistic and constitutional liberalism presuppose the effective working of institutions; antinomianism will have none of that. Of all institutions, private ownership of the means of production is the one antinomianism is most averse to. Once private property in the means of production is eliminated, the antinomians maintain, the conflict of interests—which is the dominant feature of all previously known societies and especially of modern bourgeois society—is bound to disappear.

According to this view, with the elimination of the constraints of scarcity thrown up by private property in the means of production, the cessation of obedience to tradition and conventions, the abolition of institutions in which authority operates, and the dissolution of the inhibitions and repressions inculcated by culture, human beings will enter the realm of freedom.

The program of the totalitarian temptation placed the realm of freedom in the future. Until then, class-conscious workers, whose class would be the beneficiaries of their exertions, would have to submit to the discipline of the Party until it seized power and abolished the bourgeois state. Once that had happened, then it would be necessary for the workers to continue to accept the dictatorial discipline imposed by the Party, which represented their interest.

The antinomians, by contrast, wished to live in the realm of freedom before they seized power. The culture of bohemianism is the forerunner of such an embryonic free society, living and practicing freedom in the midst of the old, oppressive, conflict-ridden, tradition-bound society.

The antinomian temptation shares with its totalitarian ancestor the anticipation of plenitude. It goes further and assumes that plenitude already exists and that it is available through the activity of government. Governments can be made to provide this plenitude if they are sufficiently pressed by the groups desiring more than they can acquire through the operations of the market.

In the totalitarian representation of the end and means of historical development there was a strain between the anarchistic-utopian and oligarchic elements. The totalitarian tempters alleged that the utopian ideal of a harmonious, freely expressive, authority-less society could be reached only by the disciplined efforts of the working class led by the Communist Party. It was by this device of placing the two contradictory articles of faith in a temporal sequence that emancipation and the unquestioning submission to the will of the Party were made to co-exist with a minimum of logical and political contradiction.

Even though the antinomian temptation places the emancipationist value far in the forefront of its several constituent elements, it does not jettison the others. Since it is in favor of plenitude through governmental action and since it is in favor of the "social ownership of the instruments of production," it is committed to socialism—and therewith to authoritative institutions. Like the totalitarians, antinomians deride the institutions of traditional individualistic and constitutional liberalism; like the totalitarians, antinomians manipulate those institutions to conduct their war against traditional individualistic and constitutional liberalism and to live their emancipated lives in a state of plenitude.

The antinomians purport to distinguish themselves from the Old Left by criticism of

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the Soviet Union and their refusal to subordinate themselves to the Communist parties of their respective countries. The disavowal is specious. The New Left collaborates with the Old Left. It is not just on a tactical calculation that the collaboration rests, but also on a fundamental agreement of values and ideas, with variations of emphasis.

The antinomians have opposed American society no less vehemently than did the Old Left. Indeed, they may be more vehement, since they have added to their own hatred of the American economy and polity the anger of the feminists and homosexuals as well as the fierce bitterness of the radical blacks with whom the New Left has made common cause.

Although the Soviet Union is criticized for its infringement on the freedom of artists and writers, its merit is unquestionable because it has firmly established the "social ownership of the instruments of production." A very important feature of this consensus of totalitarianism and antinomianism is the readiness of the antinomians, in discussions about the relation between the Soviet Union and the United States, invariably to give to the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt. The aim is always to vindicate the Soviet Union and to put the United States in the dock.

The intellectual outlook of the antinomians is by no means as discontinuous from the totalitarian outlook of the fellow travellers of the early period as some of them think. Their declared abhorrence of "bureaucratic socialism"—a euphemism to dissociate the New Left from the Soviets—has not prevented their espousal of a standard Soviet Communist interpretation of world events. The pervasive presence of the totalitarian outlook in the outlook of the antinomians had to occur, since the latter had its origin in the former. This consensus of a "vulgar" Marxist view of the world is what links the two; the numerous allegedly humanistic interpretations of Marxism persist in accepting the basic postulates of "vulgar" Marxism regarding the nature of bourgeois society.

A simplified—"vulgar"—Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist image has come to dominate the antinomian view of the world. In the Thirties, the social democratic variant of Marxism had lost its appeal to intellectuals, and the totalitarian outlook filled the vacuum in the minds of those who wished to abolish the existing order of society. Despite the judicious evasiveness of their terminology and their addition of some emancipationist wrinkles, the antinomians continue the primitive interpretation of bourgeois society that is to be found in the writings of C. Wright Mills, Paul Sweezy, Paul Baran, and Gunder Frank. They have lost faith in the industrial working class; they no longer believe in its revolutionary role; but they still demand a revolution which will introduce the "social ownership of the instruments of production." They still believe in an advance guard of revolution, variously found in students, the Third World, the peasantry, and the generally disaffected. They have come to place more confidence in guerrilla actions and in terrorism than was ever the case in social democratic Marxism or in Leninist Marxism either.

The burden of 1917 weighed as heavily on the minds of the antinomians of the Sixties as it did on the minds of the fellow travellers thirty years before. Indeed it weighed even a bit more heavily because it was necessary to give an appearance of criticizing the Soviet Union while at the same time vindicating its principles.

Nevertheless, one should not overlook the important differences. The greatest difference lies in the attitude toward emancipation. From this difference flow all others. In the antinomian outlook there is a resistance to discipline imposed from the outside, either in the form of a highly organized political party or in the form of a rigorous doctrinal orthodoxy. The antinomians reject the puritanism of the totalitarian temptation.

I had long seen through both the antinomian and the totalitarian elements in the nominally new temptation to which so many of my juniors and coevals were succumbing

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in the 1960s and 1970s. By the time the antinomian temptation appeared in its most seductive form, I knew personally some of the leading figures—although I had no close friends among them, as I had among the totalitarians. I had been reading the writings of the Frankfurt School from the very beginning. I knew Horkheimer and his fellows from the 1930s, when Horkheimer and Adorno made a feeble and unsuccessful effort to draw me into their fold. Norman Brown had been a graduate student at the University of Chicago, and so had Paul Goodman. I had intermittent contact with Habermas. I certainly was not even slightly tempted by their beliefs.

I myself had changed very little; my earlier beliefs had become more differentiated. What had been some tendencies toward a conservative liberalism became more pronounced. As an offspring of immigrant parents who would probably have been murdered in pogroms or been starved had they remained in Russia, I had good reason to be grateful to the United States. I knew of its imperfections, but given the imperfections of human beings in general, I did not expect perfection from it or from any other society. One could not contemplate the history of humanity and fail to see this unless one had yielded completely to the temptation to believe that ideal and total solutions could be found and realized. I felt very much at home with the ordinary, stalwart people of Chicago. I certainly was very aware of the horrors of life in the big cities of the United States in recent years, but that did not put me off American society. Indeed, I saw the antinomian hand in some of these horrors.

As a university teacher, I had a good opportunity to see the seduction of the younger generation by the antinomian temptation. I regretted it greatly, not only because I disapproved of the actions in which these young persons engaged under its influence but because of the losses they were causing to themselves. From the standpoint of one who was advanced in middle age and who had spent much of his life happily among university students, it seemed to me that these young antinomians were wasting the best years of their lives in pursuing unworthy or unrealizable ideals and in performing actions which no one with any self-possession would allow himself or herself to enter upon. (I exclude from this judgment the movement for the civil rights of Negroes, conducted with admirable bravery by Negro and white students.)

The war in Vietnam was a common point of departure and a common point of reference for antinomianism. It gave it the air of public legitimacy. Antinomianism was not, however, simply disapproval of American military action in Vietnam, nor was it simply the manifestation of a desire to avoid conscription.

The movement gained force from its association with the movement for the civil rights of blacks and the "black power" movement. These added to the heterogeneity and profusion of demands. Central to the whole tumult was the hatred of institutions —governmental, academic, familial, military, and economic. This was above all the hatred of authority.

As a patriot, I grieved over the hostility to the United States manifested in many wild actions, although I did certainly not deny the propriety of criticizing and even criticizing severely the policy of the government of the United States for its engagement in military activities in Southeast Asia. I myself thought that engagement justified, and I still regret that it had to be halted without success. I certainly agree that that policy was debatable, with respect both to its end and to its means, but the way in which the antinomians conducted their frenzied battle against it was utterly deplorable.

Still, it is not against the youthful demonstrators, rock throwers, bomb layers, and graffiti daubers that I would direct my criticisms. Nor would I waste words on such pied pipers as Dr. Spock, William Sloane Coffin, Frances Fitzgerald, Paul Goodman, Susan Sontag, and the Berrigans. They played a villainous part and did much damage, to recover from which American society

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will take a long time. Yet they had no special responsibility for the universities against which so much of the "revolution" was directed.

The attacks against the universities seemed to me to be a compound of cowardice, arrogance, and ignorance. The cowardice was the easiest to discern. The antinomians knew that they were contending with an easy mark. In most universities and colleges, the administrators were fearful of ceasing to be "liberals" if they came out strongly in public against the refractory students.

I was an assiduous observer of the disorders of the 1960s and early 1970s, reading carefully many newspapers—American, European, and Asian—every day and writing a detailed chronicle each quarter in *Minerva*. (In 1968, I wrote a thousand foolscap pages, subsequently printed there.) But I was also close to the agitation in the universities of Cambridge (England) and Chicago. About the former, I could cite some very striking instances of moral frivolity and faintness of heart among senior academics. But on the whole, there was nothing in the universities of Great Britain in those years which could match the scale and intensity of what went on in the United States.

In almost all universities and colleges in the United States, students went on strike, boycotted classes, staged sit-ins, abused teachers and administrators, and damaged and defaced buildings, inside and outside. In a few cases they blew up buildings; in many cases they engaged in violence and noisy demonstrations. Publicity was what they sought and often obtained. There was no central control, no co-ordination; there was no strategy, no planning. Simple-minded conservatives thought that the simultaneity and similarity of the actions on so many campuses and in so many countries were evidence of a conspiracy, but they were not. Television and to a lesser extent the printed press were a school of disruption; they took the place of a conspiracy. The agitation was the product of a common culture.

In 1901, Ellen Key published a book which in English translation was entitled *The Century of the Child*. It was a fitting way to open the century. In the United States, the educational theories of John Dewey and popular sociologized versions of psychoanalysis, joined to a romantic conception of the purity and creativity of youth and the corruption of institutions, laid the intellectual foundations for the antinomianism of the 1960s. The productivity of the American economy, the strength of the trade unions, and humanitarian labor legislation rendered it unnecessary, impractical, and even illegal for adolescents and young persons to hold remunerative employment. This made it easy for them to live in a mindless utopia. There was a consensus between adults and young persons in the United States that youth was a privileged estate, youth in universities and colleges even more so. American society after the Second World War became one in which "to be young was very heaven." At least, insofar as heaven is a realm of freedom. For the offspring of prosperous families youth was indeed a heavenly state. In such a state, all things are possible.

The desires of youth defined what was virtuous. Actions were made virtuous by being performed by young persons who were trying to "discover themselves." Universities and colleges were institutions in which young persons could discover their true, necessarily virtuous selves. This was the central article of faith of the consensus which comprehended many teachers and many students. The American universities were the incubators of this type of unreligious, unthinking antinomianism.

A very large part of the antinomian activity in the United States occurred on the campuses of universities. The disorders of antinomianism were to a very large extent the work of university students and teachers. Although the students appeared to be the sole agents of the disruption—thanks to the organs of publicity which they cultivated—the truth is that their elders must share the discredit with them. Administrators were culpable by their cowardice; teachers were culpable by their instigation and encouragement of the troublemakers.

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There was at the time much resentment among the progressivistic university teachers against the federal government, but it had been held in check by their timorousness; there was much hatred of the dead Senator McCarthy and the living President Nixon, who was never forgiven for having brought Alger Hiss to book. The knowledge that students in many universities and colleges were offending authorities in the universities and the government gave teachers who held such views courage to cheer the students' offensive. In turn, this support from their elders encouraged the antinomian students to be even more aggressive against the abdicating authorities when they saw them to be so weak. This encouragement came not only from teachers but also from university administrators, who out of ignorance and the desire to assure themselves of the benevolence of the aggressor praised the revolting students as models of high morality and civic responsibility.

The craven conduct of President James Perkins at Cornell University in embracing the black students armed with shotguns was surely one of the most infamous actions in the history of universities; it ranks with Martin Heidegger's rectoral address to the students of the University of Freiburg in 1933. Perkins was not alone. He was furthermore only an administrator.

According to academics, administrators have not much interest in academic matters. They imply that they—the academics—*do* care about them. This was not, however, the case in the time of the antinomian uprising in the universities and colleges. Much aid and comfort was given by academics to the antinomian students directly in conversations, in declamations to large audiences in public, as well as within closed meetings of governing bodies and self-constituted committees.

In all of this deplorable countrywide scene of rampant disorder by self-indulgent excited antinomians, aided by the collusion and cowardice of their elders, the University of Chicago stood out in a singular way. Even so, it was not spared from the common troubles. One incident in particular stands out in my mind.

In 1968, an incompetent young teacher of the social sciences, Mrs. Marlene Dixon, thoroughly mediocre at best, was denied promotion to a rank conferring permanent tenure. She held an appointment in one of the weaker parts of the division of the social sciences, but she was also, by courtesy, an assistant professor in the department of sociology. Her continuation at the University of Chicago depended on her re-appointment in that department as well as in the committee on human development, which had originally appointed her and which wished to re-appoint her on permanent tenure. The department of sociology, in a series of decisions of a rare unanimity—coming from both a special departmental committee which had been asked to assess her merits and the department as a whole—voted against her continuation.

"The craven conduct of President James Perkins at Cornell University in embracing the black students armed with shotguns was surely one of the most infamous actions in the history of universities."

She herself, although backward in her studies, was not backward in building a body of supporters among students. In the condition of general inflammability, her cause was taken up by the local representatives of the antinomian movement. A sit-in was undertaken—with her encouragement—and an effort was made to enlist wider student support for a strike and demonstrations. The students of the University of Chicago were at that time—they have always been—a fairly serious lot of young persons interested in their studies and enjoying quite good relations with their teachers. As a result, efforts to arouse the entire student body were unsuccessful, but the sit-in was

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put into operation and the usual "unnegotiable demands" were put forth.

It happened that at the time the president of the University of Chicago was Mr. Edward Levi, a man of exceptionally high intellectual standards and of exceptionally strong devotion to the university. The teaching staff of the university has had for over three-quarters of a century a very strong corporate solidarity—partly because of its pride in a university highly esteemed for intellectual achievement, partly because of an intense earnestness about the common performance, by individual teachers, of the central tasks of a university. When the sit-in began, there were a few teachers who supported the sitters-in, but these supporters were unsuccessful in calling forth any echo. Against them, there was an extraordinary outpouring of written expressions of concern to maintain the integrity of the university. Mr. Levi arranged for these letters, some addressed directly to him, others addressed to the entire body of teachers, to be reproduced and circulated. Whereas in other universities, the teachers who disapproved of the antinomians were isolated and those who supported them were very aggressively outspoken, the opposite occurred at the University of Chicago. The sit-in ended in about two weeks. No concessions were made to the disrupters.

While the latter were in occupation, certain members of the teaching staff and the dean of students passed through the areas of the administration building which were under occupation. They identified some of the intruders so that disciplinary action could be taken against them when calm was restored. It was rare in American universities for teachers to co-operate with the administration in this way. In the end, more than forty students were expelled without the possibility of returning to the university, and about eighty were suspended for as long as two years.

My own part in this was rather meager. I was teaching in Cambridge during the term when the sit-in took place. I was asked by the president to return, which I did almost at once. As soon as I returned, I was asked to prepare an assessment of the scholarly work of Mrs. Dixon. There was very little of it, and it was of rather poor quality. I studied it carefully and then summarized and assessed it with special reference to her knowledge of other work in her field of interest and the merits of her achievement in comparison with that work. In both respects, she came off poorly. I wrote my summary and evaluation with especial care to make the whole thing intelligible to persons not acquainted with sociological ideas, literature, and procedures. The report was circulated to all members of the university. A considerable number of colleagues outside the social sciences told me that until they read my report they had not made up their minds about the justice of the decision of the department of sociology or about the merits of the demands of her supporters that she be given permanent tenure. The report persuaded them that the agitation was baseless.

Of course, non-sociologists, and particularly those who had not read Mrs. Dixon's writings, such as they were, were not really in a position, even after reading my report, to arrive at well-founded judgments of their own. The fact that many persons who read the report were persuaded by it was evidence of the trust and respect which are necessary for the good morale of an institution. I was generally known to be one who spoke straightforwardly, as one who, so one colleague said to another, "does not look over his shoulder," who knew the literature of sociology well, and who had an exigent intellectual standard. My colleagues throughout the university, including many who had never met me, were willing to accept my characterization of Mrs. Dixon's work. Their willingness to do so was evidence of the moral health of the University of Chicago under Mr. Levi's presidency. There was nothing like this at Berkeley, Cornell, Harvard, or Columbia, and that is one of the reasons why their troubles were much more prolonged and much more injurious.

Civility is the antithesis of both the totalitarian outlook and the antinomian outlook.

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I had the good fortune to have grown up academically at the University of Chicago, where, except for a few breaches, a fundamental civility has prevailed almost from the beginning of the university. It was really in my contemplation of the University of Chicago that I formed my ideas about "academic citizenship" and the "academic ethic." I did not simply imagine these things. I saw them in front of me, learned from them, and pondered them. I was not the only one at the University of Chicago who did so.

I wish I could have called this essay "*Goodbye* to All That." But I cannot do so. It is true that the blatant aggressiveness, the confidence, the resentful insolence against any authority to whom there is an obligation, and the dogmatic certainty that reposed in Marxism are now less noisily expressed than they were in the high tide of antinomianism two decades ago. But the fundamental beliefs and disposition of the antinomians, wasteful of their own lives and destructive of others, have not evaporated. They are now less melodramatically expressed, but they still exist, and they are now entrenched in universities, as they are in American life. Whereas before they were expressed in the antics of students in a state of possession, they are now part of the ethos of adults in positions of great influence, particularly in the educational system and in the media.

Many of the antinomians have made their way as teachers within the universities which they denounced so scurrilously and whose teachers they spat on with such self-confident derision. There they continue the struggle; they express the same basic views without the exuberance and unthinking certainty of imminent triumph they had two decades before. They are no longer sure of the advent of a revolution; some of them even think that they have renounced the ecstatic politics of twenty years earlier, while in fact they still believe what they believed then. Their words have changed, their zeal has abated, but their society is still as repugnant to them as it used to be. They are like those ex-Communists of whom a student of mine once said, "They have given up their friends, but they have kept all their old enemies." The latter is certainly true of a substantial minority of that generation of university teachers now nearing or in middle age in anthropology, sociology, political science, and English and American and continental European literatures; mathematics, too, is not without some of these survivors. It is also true of a considerable part of the profession of academic historiography. It has even begun to extend into Oriental studies. And the organized declaration of the intention to boycott research on the Strategic Defense Initiative is evidence that much of both the antinomianism of twenty years ago and the totalitarianism of forty and fifty years ago has survived in the present generation of teachers and graduate students of the natural sciences.

The antinomian movement is no longer so turbulent; it rumbles occasionally, as in the matter of "divestment," but it works quietly and unceasingly in offering the totalitarian and antinomian temptations to the oncoming generation. The prophets are more quiet. *The New York Review of Books* no longer expects "the revolution" to be just around the corner; it has not published a design for bombs for a long time. Noam Chomsky is not so frequently the bold knight in the lists. C. Wright Mills, who was a "hero of his time," scarcely figures any more. Susan Sontag has climbed down from being the passionate defender of North Vietnam and the Vietcong. *Esquire,* once the "haberdashers' *Partisan Review,*" has given up the patronage of revolution and now caters to the tastes of "Yuppie" allrightnicks. Still, the fundamental drift remains.

Antinomianism can claim great success; it has permeated American society to the point where homosexuality is regarded as being as normal as heterosexuality, where abortion is as normal as childbirth, where patriotism was regarded for a long time as proto-fascist, and where being in favor of "law and order" was unmentionable for an equally long time.

The totalitarian temptation was successful among intellectuals—mainly literary and

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artistic—and among some journalists and scenario writers. The antinomian temptation has been much more successful. It has reached into the academic world with a depth and scope which the totalitarian temptation was never able to attain. The quiet triumph of the antinomian temptation is a double triumph, moreover, because it has carried the debilitated totalitarian temptation with it in its wake. In fact, the antinomian temptation has won more victims for the totalitarian temptation than the totalitarian temptation in its own time was ever able to do. The totalitarian temptation never tempted as many persons into regarding Communists as honest critics, as agents of humane ideals whom it is wrong to distrust, as the antinomian temptation has been successful in doing. The totalitarian temptation never tempted as many persons to join the denunciation of the American government or to disrupt the universities on the scale the antinomian temptation was able to achieve.

Why has the antinomian temptation been so much more successful than the totalitarian temptation? One tentative answer is that the antinomian temptation came on the scene when the belief that youth is the sacred time of life had become very strong. The reputed virtues of youth—purity of motive, freedom from self-seeking, devotion to ideals, straightforwardness of expression—were exploited by the antinomians. Their elders were already determined to believe that wisdom would come out of the mouths of babes. It was a time when the weight of responsibilities within society and in the dealings with other societies was becoming too heavy to bear. The seemingly endless conflicts of international politics, the frightful complexity of central government, the apparently limitless powers of science for good and evil, the difficulties of being rational and wise in a world without the comforts of religious beliefs and too intricate to master by unaided reason—these placed a premium on solutions with the merit of simplicity and purity. Large parts of American society found in the antinomian temptation a surrogate for the bucolic idyll which they were too sophisticated to take seriously. The antinomian ideal was against all the wrong things—authority, bureaucracy, technological risks, routines, far-reaching rationalization, wearisome traditions, the postponement of pleasures into the remote future, sexual puritanism. It was in favor of all the right things—spontaneity, directness and frankness in speech, unencumbered expression of emotion, the ready gratification of desire, and the complete freedom to do as one wishes.

Yet the antinomian temptation kept enough of the negative side of the totalitarian temptation to furnish itself with a "theory" of modern society, of exploitation and imperialism, and with the idea of a revolution which would break the rigid, inhumane bourgeois society. Most important, it retained one of the crucial elements of the totalitarian temptation, namely, the image and locus of the ideal center: the Soviet Union. For practical and fundamental reasons the Soviet Union cannot have the same place in the antinomian temptation that it had in the totalitarian one. It has done too much to discredit itself. The preachers of the antinomian temptation do not wish to be dragged down by the plain averment of a leaning toward the Soviet Union. That would be too contrary to the emancipationist ideal. Yet that central part of the totalitarian temptation has not been renounced. No virtues are explicitly attributed to the Soviet

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Union; it has them attributed to it only implicitly when the United States has to be put in the wrong. Then the old devotion shines through. It has, after all, achieved one of the most valuable features of both the totalitarian and the antinomian temptations; it has achieved the "social ownership of the instruments of production." That after all is the precondition for emancipation.

Nevertheless, the mood which led to the rush toward the antinomian temptation, or which allowed it to attract many persons who affirmed it in a rather passive way, has by no means swept the field in the United States. Whatever may be the ravages of secularism and hedonism in American society—the ravages which have enabled the antinomian temptation to be so tempting—puritanism, patriotism, and piety still exist in large parts of the population. There are also liberals—liberals of the type who believe in the freedom of contract, the rule of law, freedom of the press, freedom of association, free elections and representative institutions, and the practice of reasoned discourse in public affairs.

Most liberals in the United States are collectivistic liberals. They tend toward social democracy on the one side and toward antinomianism on the other. Nevertheless, many still adhere to the kind of liberalism which emerged when a great many traditional liberals began to divest their outlook of the primacy of private property and the freedom of contract and to interest themselves in the enhanced role of the state in promoting the common good through the provision of goods and services, particularly to the poorer strata of the population.

In the first third of the present century, American liberals, i.e., collectivistic liberals, thought of themselves as a beleaguered group in American society. They saw American society as a society of philistines, unreflective, avid in the pursuit and admiration of wealth, individualistic in their unconcern for their fellowmen, indifferent to the "finer things of life," harshly repressive toward individuals who were sensitive to "higher values" or who followed a mode of life or thought which departed from the prevailing pattern. The liberals, having already extended their views toward governmental intervention in the market, also reached out toward bohemianism, "free love," or sexual freedom. They took to espousing the rights of "revolutionary" associations like the Communist Party and the Industrial Workers of the World. They not only defended the right to the peaceful existence of these groups, they showed themselves to be not unsympathetic with the substance of their views. They began to look upon the groups whose rights to existence they defended as fellow believers in the same social ideals. Thus it developed that in the 1930s and after the Second World War, American liberals—again emphasizing that they are collectivistic liberals—became the defenders of the Communist Party against accusations of subversion, espionage, and hypocrisy. (This was the beginning of the "anti-anti-Communist" attitude.) From defending the right of revolutionary groups to believe as they did, liberals became defenders—and even the exponents—of their beliefs. Those who criticized and opposed Communists and Communism were regarded by collectivistic liberals as the enemies of liberalism. There were liberals in the United States who guarded themselves against this particular deformation of liberalism, but they were not in the majority.

Liberalism made similar mistakes when antinomianism appeared on the scene. The collectivistic liberals must accept much of the blame for the antinomian upsurge. Although in their heart of hearts they themselves were not antinomians, they did support and encourage the antinomians. For this they got little thanks.

Without distinguishing between collectivistic and constitutional liberalism, the antinomians hated liberalism as such because liberalism praises the exercise of reason, which was obviously repugnant to them. They hated it too because it respects the right of individual freedom rationally practiced; the antinomians wanted freedom for themselves and primarily for the immediate

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gratification of their desires, while both constitutional and collectivistic liberalism require some self-restraint, partly out of respect for the rights of others to their freedom. The antinomians hated liberalism because liberalism postulates the stability and effective working of institutions; institutions are antipathetic to the antinomians. Liberalism requires governmental and institutional authority, and that is above all hateful to the antinomians, although they are partial to regimes in which authority is totalitarian and themselves expect to obtain all the benefits of omniprovident authority within their own society.

It was very common for the antinomians to assert that liberalism had failed and had to be discarded on behalf of antinomianism. This, like nearly everything else said by the antinomians, was untrue. Liberalism had not failed except in the sense that the proponents of its collectivistic variant did not foresee the necessity of safeguards against its beneficiaries and its enemies. The collectivistic liberals viewed the former with unqualified benevolence and the latter unthinkingly as like-minded allies.

Liberalism did not preside over the creation of universities in the Middle Ages and early modern times, but ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century constitutional liberalism in all Western countries has contributed greatly to their growth and improvement. Collectivistic liberalism, too, has done much for them; it also owes a great deal to them, particularly in the academic social sciences. The presence of so many students in universities, and of so many teachers, was a triumph of liberalism, with its belief in enlightenment, in the value of inducting each generation into the cultural heritage; the greatly increased numbers owed much to the powers of collectivistic liberalism. The growth of scientific knowledge has been promoted by both kinds of liberalism. It may indeed be said that the growth and expansion of knowledge are central to liberalism; they are values of the same standing as individual liberty and the exercise of reason and civility, which subsume the free press and representative institutions as well as the rule of law.

At the same time, the vehement and rancorous outburst of antinomianism was fostered by collectivistic liberals. Every one of the insane demands of the antinomians was an extension into an extreme form of some article of belief of collectivistic liberalism. The demands of feminists, homosexuals, and pornographers are all derivable from the postulates of the value of the freedom of the individual and the goodness of expressing one's true self. The aggressive, hate-filled denunciation of governmental authority is an extension of constitutional and collectivistic liberalism into an extreme form of the liberal demand for individual freedom and its effort to restrict the arbitrary exercise of authority. The demand for the legalization of drugs is an extension into an extreme form of the postulate of the value of individual freedom and of hedonistic gratification, which had become a primary value of collectivistic liberalism. In fact, if liberalism is to be criticized, it is for having encouraged and tolerated the antinomian tendency. It is characteristic of the self-centered ingratitude of the antinomians of the 1960s and 1970s that they took special pleasure in announcing the bankruptcy or death or wickedness of liberalism. All that they were they owed to liberalism, setting aside a strong admixture of their own bad characters.

Although I would exculpate liberalism as an intellectual and political tradition from the charges made against it by the antinomians, I do not exculpate the collectivistic liberals for their role in encouraging and helping the antinomians. The predominant collectivist tendency of liberalism in the United States has encouraged belief in the omnicompetent, omniprovident state, and this has encouraged the demandingness of the antinomians while at the same time it has encouraged their hostility against the state. More serious is the deficiency of the collectivistic liberals in failing to draw the line between liberalism and antinomianism, just as from the 1930s onward collectivistic liberals were not and have not been courageous

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enough or perceptive enough to draw the necessary line between their kind of liberalism and Communism. Senator Joseph McCarthy was a poor stick, but the collectivistic liberals who opposed him were wrong to think or to pretend to think that Communist spies and traitors like Alger Hiss and the Rosenbergs were not spies and traitors. Of this particular tendency in collectivistic liberalism the antinomians have been perfect heirs.

One of the most disgraceful aspects of the antinomian episode in recent American history has been this inability and unwillingness of collectivistic liberals to see where liberalism ends and treason and subversion begin. It was the collectivistic liberals who either encouraged or stood by approvingly when the students and their older confederates conducted their campaign on behalf of the Vietcong and the North Vietnamese Communists. It has been the collectivistic and perhaps also the constitutional liberals who—fearful, unjustifiably fearful, of the "slippery slope"—have encouraged by their complaisance the free distribution of pornography.

Collectivistic liberals are like the members of the Democratic Party in a certain ward of Chicago, who were said by Mr. Dooley to be so loyal to their party that they would sooner die than be buried by a Republican undertaker. Liberals would sooner see their society ruined than learn something valuable to its preservation from conservatism. There is much that liberals must learn and assimilate from conservatism if they would conserve a regime of freedom. Traditionality, nationality, normality, civility—these are among the values which collectivistic and constitutional liberals must acquire. It is because they failed to make necessary distinctions and because they failed to see their affinities with conservatism that they have been so compliant in the face of the totalitarian and antinomian temptations.

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Matisse's broken circle

by W. S. Di Piero

In the historical analysis of abstraction in modern art proposed by Frank Stella in his 1984 Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, published last year as *Working Space,* Matisse is practically a nonentity. Stella presents art history as a chronicle of progress articulated in the recurrent problem of pictorial space. The challenge met by the early abstractionists was that of exploiting the resources of the flatness of the picture plane; for later generations it became that of generating dimensionality rather than merely illustrating a surface. Caravaggio is the first hero in the chronicle because it was he who responded to the enfeeblement of pictorial space in Mannerist painting by creating what Stella calls "projective space," the deepening of the isolated image in a painting without a correspondent illusionist deepening of scenic elements. The modern heroes are Kandinsky, Mondrian, and Malevich, who redefined abstractionist space in ways which pushed beyond the spatial redefinitions of Cubism and, as a consequence, prepared the way for a new generation of problem-solvers —Hofmann, Pollock, and de Kooning. Picasso's presence in this story is an ambiguous one, because the inventive extensions of his Cubist work were followed by a retreat from the dynamic abstractionism to which the Cubist work was leading him. Matisse's role, in Stella's scheme of things, is a kind of negative adjunct to Kandinsky's efforts to consolidate for abstraction the pictorial expansiveness of expressionism. Had it not been for Kandinsky's rescue efforts, the exuberances of expressionism "would have hardened into the compressed planes of Picasso, Malevich, or Mondrian, or would have simply dispersed themselves into the turpentine washes of Matisse."

His peculiar absence from Stella's long and detailed argument is especially odd because in some historical accounts Matisse's work represents the contest between representation and abstraction, with the latter winning out toward the end. His investigations of line and color, from the early apprentice work, through the dissonant colorism of the Fauve period and the sunny decorative essays of the Nice period, up to the murals and paper cut-outs of his last years, constitute (the argument goes) an exemplary career that demonstrates how the dissipating energies of representationalism yielded to an inevitable emergent abstractionism. Stella seems to have the reverse of this in mind, that Matisse was evading the most pressing formal question of his age by practicing an art which was lethargically dispersive, and which thinned out pictorial space to an almost etherealized representationalism. Blent into Stella's passing remark is Matisse's notorious description of his ambition in *Notes of a Painter,* the theoretical statement written in 1908 when he was thirty-nine: "What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art [which would have] a soothing, calming

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influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue." I don't think any modern artist has suffered so much praise and vilification for any confession as Matisse has for his "armchair" defense; and the significance of the facts of his career, including of course his own commentary on it, is more radically determined by the historical perspective of the viewer than the career of any other modern painter. For Pierre Schneider, Matisse's most astute, comprehensive, and exasperating commentator, that career was a constant struggling to negotiate the contrary demands of image-making and representation, abstraction and realism, East and West, the Eternal and the quotidian, religion and the world. For Frank Stella, so far as the rich, crooked vein of abstraction is concerned, Matisse is practically irrelevant.

I do not share Stella's advocacy, and I am not persuaded by Schneider's argument that Matisse's art recapitulates and advances nearly all the religious and formalist questions of representationalism since the Middle Ages. In trying to account for what I feel to be the almost nightmarish tenacity of Matisse's images, I am less concerned with his place or "role" in one or another historical reconstruction of modernist experience than with the specific, unprogrammatic ways he chose to answer to his materials, his subjects, and his religious sensibility, all of which he shares with certain crucial predecessors. I take him to be a painter whose "evolution" or development is beside the point, whose career is a tidal attentiveness, constant but shifting, not to historical "problems" but to emergent consolidations and dissolutions of forms. He was, with Picasso (though without Picasso's theatricalism), the most self-aware artist of the century. He knew how his images might be, and indeed have generally been, received as immediately available occasions for joy without consequence. But acted out over his long life was a less serene, and certainly less consolatory, drama: the will to joy straining against the distances of eros.

If we need a historical matrix to clarify Matisse's activity, we can find it in the Renaissance controversy between drawing and color; *disegno* versus *colorito*; Florence, where cartooning or drawing was the essence of imitating nature accurately, against Venice, where artists like Giorgione and Tintoretto often painted directly on the canvas without preliminary drawing. In his superb book, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice,* David Rosand frames the quarrel by citing Vasari's definition of painting as "a plane the surface of which is covered by fields of color . . . which by virtue of a good drawing (*buon disegno*) of circumscribed lines define the figure." Though he was an apologist for Florentine values, Vasari accurately represented Giorgione's view that "painting only with the colors themselves, without any preparatory studies drawn on paper, was the true and best way of working and *il vero disegno.*" Drawing as the discipline of nature impressed upon the working imagination held a tremendous appeal for Matisse, but so did the textural immediacy of emotion expressed in color.

A historical matrix is not determinant, however; it is an illustrative, explanatory pattern that might help us see into the life of forms as it is lived out and expressed by an artist. Matisse's relation to Italian art was the ostensible subject of "Matisse et l'Italie," an exhibition mounted last summer in Venice which included nearly sixty paintings, a dozen or so paper cut-outs, over a hundred drawings, and sixty-three sculptures, most of these materials on loan from the Musée Matisse in Nice.[1] The exhibition drew fire from the Italian press because of what some writers found to be its dubious premise and lackluster, thematically incoherent content, and others felt to be an instance of art-as-spectacle boosterism. In his catalogue essay,

1 "Matisse et l'Italie" was curated by Pierre Schneider at the Museo Correr in Venice (May 30-October 18, 1987). Catalogue essays were contributed by Pierre Schneider, Attilio Codognato, Xavier Girard, Christian Arthaud, and Giandomenico Romanelli; the catalogue was published by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore.

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Pierre Schneider concentrates mostly on Matisse's documented encounters with and imitations of Italian art, his occasional use of Italian models and subjects, and the nebulous matter of Italian influences on his work. He reports what Matisse saw during his two extended trips to Italy in 1907 and 1925 and speculates about what Matisse may have absorbed from the examples of Mantegna, Piero, Tintoretto, and from the Byzantine mosaics. (Matisse's son-in-law, Georges Duthuit, an expert on mosaics, went with him on the 1925 trip to Sicily.) Matisse's curiosity about certain Renaissance artists is evident enough in the copies and adaptations he made of Pollaiuolo's *Hercules and Anteaus* and *Hercules Battling the Hydra*, and in the drawings *Day* (1922) and a nude from 1935, which were modeled on Michelangelo's figures in the Medici tomb. His interest in the mosaics achieves its fullest expression in the paper cut-outs of the late period, especially *The Bees*, where the image-likeness is indistinguishable from the brilliant, clustered particulars of paper "bits." But Matisse's remark in a letter in 1941, that he always had to cope with the "eternal conflict between line and color," suggests that the shaping impulse in his career was not a progressive, developmental, historically determined one but rather one of struggling emergent form answering to the forms of nature as they are felt by the artist. In a sense, a great artist is never directly influenced by any other artist and is certainly not the creation of historical necessity. Other practices, exempla, and problems are chiefly enabling occasions by which an artist can look more deliberately into the skeins of what is, momentarily, inexpressible.

The peculiar spatial stress in Matisse's painting resulted from his compound need to analyze (or atomize) and to fuse. In the 1914 painting *Marguerite in a Feather Hat*, gobbets of color define the subject's face and costume: pink cheeks and nose ridge, slate jaw line, yellow forehead, black choker with golden bits. Pasty white outlining isolates each color patch. The atoms of color in the composition are pushed apart, islanded by the lines of force created by the contouring. There is not much tension among the colors; they are not poised to snap back into place. The painting is not a pictorial field in jeopardy as it is in Giacometti's paintings and in some of Cézanne's late work. Matisse's forms are placidly rotund, unperturbed by the tentative distensions they constitute. But it is an image of separation and estrangement, and of nostalgia for an impossible coherence. That same year Matisse produced *Head, White and Rose*, where the color compounds are arranged in vertical red, black, and cream stripes. Spearing down through the draped, steely colors are the V's and triangles that structure the drawing. The draftsmanship disciplines the pudgy colorism into rigorous schematic flatbeds. The color has not been built or dressed on the drawing; it has been welded to it, and Matisse boldly lets the seams show.

The *disegno* element is, almost from the beginning of Matisse's career, a sculptural modeling. In early paintings like *Male Nude* (1893-1895) and *Seated Old Man* (1893-1895), he was working to convert volume and mass into contour. He was trying to realize in the draftsmanship of those paintings the muscularity that we see in the actual sculptures he executed between 1900 and 1910. (In *The Serf*, for example, the planes fold and buckle into sharp ridges; the slave's back, with its big rocky lumps, is overmuscled with work, deformed by exertions.) The bulked-up, contracted musculature and heavily creased definition of the *Male Nude* become, in the painting of the old man, flaccid expansions. In his copy of Philippe de Champaigne's *Dead Christ* (1895), the anatomy is assembled in blocks of drawing and streams of paint; shoulder joint, rib cage, kneecap, all seem modeled in advance then mounted. It is painting as joinery, not as florid, plastic emergence. It is also patiently accumulative, a characteristic of Matisse's productions generally, even the colorist ecstasies of the Fauve period. The dead Christ is not just an exercise in anatomy or historical revisionism. Working within the

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conventional formal restraints of a "copy," Matisse at the very start of his career is making an image of religious feeling. I cannot follow a mind like Stella's which celebrates Caravaggio's innovative use of "projective space" as if this formal quality could be dissociated from the drivenness of Caravaggio's religious imagination which wanted a more violent plasticity of the picture surface precisely in order to accommodate the wild desire to be summoned, chastised, wracked, saved. When Matisse remakes a *Dead Christ*, the expression of religious temperament is more compelling than its initiating formal source in Mantegna's famous canvas. Matisse's dead god is in a state of repose. The flesh seems about to stir or twitch; it is not the death of a nature. Consciousness has been only momentarily adjourned. Matisse's Christ is a conquered deity, not one who has languished into death. In the darkest, plummiest patch of flesh, where light barely surfaces, a pursed smile hovers on the god's face.

The religious imagination is a respondent, form-making act of consciousness back toward and into that which it believes has shaped *it*—the force of otherness. It replies to the givenness of existence by reshaping the forms of nature into the forms of work. It desires a complete expression of particulars, which are absorbed but not disintegrated into a welded whole, an allness. It assumes and is aware of a reality greater and more inclusive than individual consciousness and it allows that awareness to shape its products. It seeks fusion even while it sedulously practices analysis and individuation. In such terms, Matisse's career was the most sustained and variegated exercise of religious imagination of our time. Even more than Cézanne and Giacometti, and in a more methodical and self-conscious way than Van Gogh, he practiced painting as an expansive ceremonial of consciousness. And the eternal conflict between line and color was for him a medium of erotic desire. The presiding precursor of Matisse's enterprise was Giotto. Matisse's remarks about him arc over the long middle period of his career. In *Notes of a Painter* he wrote: "When I see Giotto's frescos in Padua, I'm not worried about knowing which episode from Christ's life I'm looking at, but I immediately understand the feeling triggered by them, because it's contained in the lines, in the composition, in the colors, and the title serves only to confirm my impression." He saw in Giotto a comprehensiveness, an integral completeness, that was both preliminary and summative, which possessed the preparatory definitions of cartooning and the conclusive exaltations of color fields. Matisse had already described in 1907 the two preoccupations that sheered off from Giotto's unities as Siennese primitivism and spirituality (*disegno*) and Venetian physicality (*colorito*). Giotto remained the model of achieved completion and must have come to seem even purer as Matisse worked his way, decade by decade, through all the formal consequences of the break-up of that unity. As late as 1946 he writes to Pierre Bonnard, "Giotto is the peak of my aspirations. But the journey toward something which, in our time, would constitute the equivalent is too long for one life." In that statement seethes his own awareness of the inevitable incompleteness of the task he had set for himself. Modern unities equivalent to those achieved by Giotto were clearly impossible. What he could do, however, was make art out of the desire for such completions.

Some of the pieces on display in Venice demonstrate the small, discrete operations by which Matisse conducted his investigations. The pigment in the orientalized *Poppies* (1908) is buoyant, airy; the drawing matters less than the gestural coloring. Drawing with the brush, Matisse is trying to fix in a momentary "Japanese" way his feeling for the brevity of that natural existence. (He often said that he painted not subjects but the emotion stirred in him by subjects.) In *Still Life with Negro Statuette* (1908-1909), the dusty red patch of ground on which stands a green-black flask, a jug, and crimson statuette, seems rubbed or burnished into the sooty primed canvas. The friction of color against the support ignites

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a kind of drawing. Neither of these has the frontal, heavily colored presence, however, of the 1909 portraits of Matisse's son Pierre and of Nono, the daughter of one of Matisse's best friends. The drawing of Nono's chin, jaw, and high constrictive collar is an entrenchment, a held line that determines and restrains a muscular, physical coloring. The red of Nono's lips, like the creamy yellow bow in her hair, is explosively ornamental against the constraints of drawing. Pierre's chalice-shaped head with its liquid flesh tones suggests immediately the vivacious ethereality of Botticelli's youths, but the drawing is so thickly banded and the color so voluminous that the delicate veils of drawing in which Botticelli and other cinquecento Florentines encoded Neoplatonic idealizations are reduced to a more physical, less idealized Venetian concentrate. In *Notes of a Painter,* Matisse says that more than still life or landscape he was interested in painting the human figure because it "best permits me to express my almost religious awe toward life." For him the image-making activity was steeped in imminence, in the saturated immediacy of color fields whose stressed elasticity was governed and contested by line.

The contractions and expansions of this process are starkly apparent in the many drawings exhibited in Venice. In *Seated Nude with Drapery in her Lap* (1924), the shoulders, neck, upper arms, and head look like cutaway views of sinew and muscle tissue, while the breasts and abdomen are literally more fleshed out, dressed, corporeal. The *Portrait of a Young Girl* (1920), on the other hand, shows a more finished and conventionalized exactitude of anatomical detail. In the 1923 *Nude Standing Before a Mirror* Matisse's attention is concentrated almost entirely on the colorist quality of the shading and not at all on anatomical delineation; it is a study of light changing the flesh into a negative image of itself. The smudged gray substance of flesh in the figure before the mirror is contained by a white nimbus. *In* the mirror that figure is blanched, unfleshed, defined entirely by the strong outlining. The darkest surface in the image is the mirror that mediates the definitiveness of the drawing and the "colorism" of the charcoal shading.

Important artists of the past century have had to live out in their work some version of the fall from the innocence of realist representation. Pierre Schneider has noted that from 1917 to 1919 Matisse was intensely interested in Renoir's painting because Renoir was really the last painter for whom a picture was a representation rather than an image. Matisse was looking for a guide to the recovery of "the innocence which makes realism convincing," says Schneider. "It was a vain hope: once it has been lost, there is no way of recovering innocence. Once the gap between what is seen and what is painted has been laid open, the artist can no longer pretend that he is not a prisoner of painting; once he has made the transition from representations to images, he cannot turn back." In Matisse's case it was not so much a transition as an interrupted circuit, a now snapped fictive loop that had once connected nature to consciousness to expressive forms. Matisse had no nostalgic illusions about lost innocence. Of his portraits and nudes he once said, "I do not create a woman, I make a picture." A painter makes forms on surfaces, he does not create; he forges images, he does not counterfeit nature. If those images represent anything, they represent the state of emotion infused in the artist by his subject. Emotion is the inwarding of the subject; Matisse sought a fully respondent image for that complex of emotions initiated by the subject. This aspiration is quite different from the one practiced by Giacometti, who acted out his own fall from innocence. Giacometti wanted a retinal purity and accuracy of representation. For Matisse, the process was heightened by his own peculiarly intense and certainly unorthodox religious sensibility. In 1951, three years before he died, Matisse closed the parenthesis opened by his 1908 remark about religious awe: "All art worthy of the name is religious. Be it a creation of

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lines, or colors: if it is not religious, it does not exist. If it is not religious, it is only a matter of documentary art, anecdotal art . . . which is no longer art."

The Italian Woman (1916) has the formal rigor and aloofness of a devotional image. In this, as in most of Matisse's female portraits, there is a mysterious grace that transcends the quotidian norms of courtesy. The female image enacts attention but not curiosity: the visage, the representational presence, does not invite us into the formal life of the image, as it does, for instance, in the glamorous hungers of de Kooning's women, or the pliant curiosities of Modigliani's. Matisse's female images are recessive, self-withholding, largely because figuration is given over so entirely to formal invention and variation. Only Picasso rivals Matisse in this, but Picasso's imagination was more imperious, colonizing, and acquisitive, Matisse's more inquisitive and elusive. In *The Italian Woman* the black bow-sweep of nose and browline—a form Matisse worked throughout his life: it reappears even in the large, architectural, brush-and-ink *Acrobats* and *Plane Trees* of his last decade—are drawn with iron severity. It's a figure of erotic refusal. But the painting also makes one of the shattering gestures in Matisse's career, though it's executed, like his other extraordinary gestures—like, most of all, the plasmic throbbing ground of *Red Studio* and *Harmony in Red*—with unsettling quietude. The fall of black hair drawn like a half-keyhole over the *italienne*'s shoulder thins and lifts outward in a winged, opaque, yellow-green veil covering the clearly visible shape of the arm beneath it. The painting generates this second plane, a second "flatness," with no coy trompe l'oeil effects. The figure of the woman streams from the peeled surface, which is itself an extension of the picture's primary surface. The drawing of the figure mediates that pressurized confluence.

Most of Matisse's female portraits present an image of worldly consciousness on the far side of surprise. The *italienne*'s stern countenance is an extreme case. The grace of his female figures lies in their fullness of consciousness as it meets the world in a casual, cunning repose. The quality of surprise abides instead in the image-making, and it is the awe that survives the fall from innocence. In *The Italian Woman* it takes the form of the picture plane's second skin. In the *Odalisque* (1937) hanging in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the blue and purple wallpaper stripes behind the figure are squeezed directly from the tube in ridged pigment chains, percussing the decorative order of the image. And the woman's ornaments—a hairpin, white flower, rings, bracelets, anklet—are likewise built up with squibs of paint. The already intensely colored image of an odalisque is thus decorated with its own materials: the ornamental value of the paint is indistinguishable from its expressive use.

Woman with a Turban (Portrait in a Moorish Chair) (1929-1930) is an answer to the Laurette paintings of 1916-1917, with their marshy greens soaking large areas of the canvas, and the ripe, full-fleshed face of Laurette an image of voluptuous patience. In the later work Matisse evacuates the very space he had made vibrate with color in the earlier paintings. The image-suggestiveness of corporeality has been violently retracted. The faintly sketched woman and her chair seem an after-image; the conventional signs of corporeality have been reduced to minimal gestural drawing. Except for the ends of the moss-green turban that flare out behind her head like mismatched wings. That image of flight, of the leavening of substance, is the most sensuously *present* element in the picture, and it harmonizes—lurchingly—with the green floor and wainscoting that surround the phantasmal figure. Matisse thus grounds, domesticates, binds that sign of flight in the composition. This is one announcement of the end of innocence. And yet the decorative ornament, the turban, carries a celebratory charge. That suggestiveness becomes all-governing in the blue nudes of his last years, where the carefully segregated forces of drawing and color, of emotion and emblem, are melted into cropped color fields; in *Blue Nude II* we can

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see the seams, the memory of the task worked through after the loss of innocence, where the sculpted sheets of color have been tacked or stitched together to make an image of a contrived whole—since nothing could ever be whole or complete again.

Matisse's nebulous, instinctive religiosity ("I always let myself be guided by my instincts") expressed itself as a cult of eros. The dialectic stress between color and line, the dramatic readjustments of the elasticity among elements in a picture, the compulsive enjambments of colorist jubilance and the structural asceticism of drawing, were all practices of that cult. "Cult" is not too strong a word; it delivers the force and inflexibility of Matisse's discipline of work. To the question in the self-interview in *Jazz* of whether he believed in God, he replied, "Yes, when I work." Eros is the god-force described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium.* Ever since Zeus cut humans in two ("like a sorb-apple halved for pickling or an egg sliced with a hair") we have been guided and driven in our choices by erotic desire, which is the felt need to reunite our original whole nature, "to make one of two, and to heal the state of man." Matisse, we know, wanted his art to be of a comforting, healing kind, but that intention is inseparable from a poetics of divisive expectation.

The large canvas of *The Joy of Life* hanging above the staircase in the Barnes Foundation is Matisse's most complexly detailed image of erotic desire. Nude figure-clusters in the bottom half of the frame make a platform or pedestal on the center of which is displayed the circle of six dancers. There is no depth to the image; the compositional elements are displayed on the canvas as upon an arras. There are a shepherd piping to his flock, two recumbent females facing each other on the grass, a musician, and two pairs of lovers in near embrace, one member of each pair resisting or turned slightly away from the greeting of the other. Out from these figures grow trees that form the canopy of the upper hemisphere, enclosing and "framing" the dancers. Each figure enacts an episode or disposition in the tidal stirrings of eros: the deflected or postponed bonding of the lovers; the perfected language of music replacing imperfect speech; the ritual preparations of desire of the female fastening a garland while another crouches to gather more flowers. The drawing asserts the circumstantial enthrallments of desire, while the color images assert the stilled sensuousness of flesh—Matisse painted the body's eager fullness as both a desired and desirous thing. The separate figures are particularized renderings of the condition summarized in the core group. As in the *Dance* paintings in the Museum of Modern Art and the Hermitage, each dancer in *The Joy of Life* suffers a different erotic quality induced by the spinning movement. One leans away as if bullied by centrifugal force; another pitches into the turn, its leaning angular shape a figure of self-abandonment; another turns in *contrapposto,* upper body toward the center of the ring, feet turned away, as if negotiating lashing counterforces.

In each of these paintings, however, the circle of the dance is broken, or incomplete. The pitching figure leans toward the welding spot that would unite the dancers in a closed ring, in the image equivalent of Plato's original human beings: "The man was originally the child of the sun, the woman of the earth, and the man-woman of the moon, which is made up of sun and earth, and they were all round and moved round because they resembled their parents." In *The Joy of Life,* the dancer's outstretched hand melts into the oblivion of the color-ground. In the Museum of Modern Art's *Dance (First Version),* the ground is divided into two monochrome fields, dense royal Titianesque green and blue. Upon those holy ceremonial fields are drawn figures caught up in the movement toward union in which the god announces himself, when the individuated self disintegrates into the allness of the fused ring.

Matisse's expressions of desire are not heated or satyric. He is, as Clement Greenberg once said, a cold painter. But if his tone is cooler or at least more temperate than

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Picasso's or Modigliani's, his images of desire are more insinuating, for he painted that broken circle not as a tumultuous, sensational event, but as a normal, ritualized, droning, piercing fact of existence. The huge gray solitudes of the dancers in the Barnes Foundation lunettes—viewed from below they look like celestial forms stirring toward union—refuse to allow the eye to gather up the entire form or to linger on any detail. For all their billowing voluminous color, the dancers are elusive, almost frailly so, a sweeping afterthought of color left behind by the velocity of the drawing. They are erotic partners enacting the graceful but arrested expectations that Keats expressed in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,/ Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve." Each figure strikes a position of receiving or giving familiar to us both from images of the Graces in Renaissance painting and from the contentious earthbound rituals of modern dance. In Matisse's rendering we see a dance pose or attitude in a purely mobile, fluid state. It is an image of the agitated, repetitious anticipation and fanatical attention of erotic attractions. But the most personal expression of that kind of fanatical attention is the *Nymph and Faun with Flutes* (1940-1943). The faun looms over the reclining nymph, calling her to wakefulness by the language of his music. His song is a representation of the desire to close the distance between them; the entire scene is an image of intensely delayed union. The numerous versions of this scene that Matisse produced are his most autobiographical works, because he was presenting his vision of his own faunish, musical activity as a maker of images.

Less starkly autobiographical are the many domestic interiors where completion of an interfused domestic community is rendered in the direction of the gaze. Attention is the medium of relations among things. "I paint not things," Matisse once said, "but the relations between things." In *The Music Lesson* (the version in the Barnes Foundation) the boy at the piano reads music while his teacher looks over his shoulder; both gazes converge on that shared language. Near the piano a male figure sits smoking, reading a book. On the piano, the violin so familiar in Matisse's interiors lies exposed in its case, and there is also a score by Haydn. On the wall hangs a woman's portrait; the painting, product of the artist's attentive desire, is integrated as decorative artifact into the larger scheme of attention. A large window opening onto a garden frames a woman embroidering in a chair, and beyond her an "exterior" artifact, a recumbent statue gazing down upon itself. Each isolated patch in the image cross-refers us to others; the interior and exterior spaces, the private and the public, the space of culture and that of nature, converse in the objects. Illusionist depth is collapsed so forcefully that these attentive postures—we bear witness to both the activities of consciousness and its formed products—are stood upright like elements in an icon. The degrees of attention range from the clarities of music to the coarse delights of what I take to be a dime novel being read by the seated male. The piano lesson and the embroidery are, like the painting and statue, idealizations of an object of desire. Each discrete solitude is an extension of consciousness toward something else, the most ceremonialized being the picture, the statue, and the Haydn score, all products of form-giving consciousness. The summative ceremony, and the big unifying effort, is the picture entitled *The Music Lesson.*

For more than thirty years Matisse owned Cézanne's *Three Bathers,* and from that example he learned quickly—having begun to paint at the age of twenty-one he had to learn everything quickly—that a painting is a made pictorial thing, an expressive likeness originating in, but not representative of, primary nature. One of the pictures in Venice, *Vase of Flowers* (1898-1900), is an obvious homage to Cézanne's way of building up a surface with choppy, richly pigmented brushstrokes and animating it with thickly inflected colors. But the great lesson he

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learned from the older painter was always to defy what is already known, to break down what is too available or "workable." So that although Matisse learned something of color plasticity and the dimensionality of the picture surface from Cézanne, his own defiant curiosity led him to investigate the spaciousness of separated forms.

The different practices are stunningly evident in the arrangement of their works in the Barnes Foundation, where historical relation matters less than structural correspondences.[2] In the main hall is Matisse's *Seated Riffian* (1913). The square, green-robed figure is laid on a yellow and green background—or backdrop, since it is another of Matisse's color fields "hung" on the canvas like a decorative veil. The face is an assemblage of ochre, green-blue, and mustard swatches tenuously stitched together. Color and line are not compelled into their patterns by a conceptual structure, as they are in Cubist compositions; they seem instead to have arrived there as the accidental result of the artist's desire for new enjambments. The face, as in so many of Matisse's portraits, contemplates its own incompleteness, its provisional imageness; it does not return the attention of the outsider. On the wall opposite is a portrait of Madame Cézanne, *Woman in a Green Hat*. Cézanne draws us into the subject's posture of attention with brief, silky swabs of color built up and fused in such a way as to invite into the pictorial event the erotic participation of our own attention. The life of eros in the painting, as in Cézanne's work generally, thrives in the plaited, slatted, cross-hatched piling up of color. In Matisse, eros thrives on separation and detachment; it lives in the stressful estrangements of color and line—of line yearning for color and color for the "natural" restraints of line.

For an abstractionist like Frank Stella, who figures in all this because he is such an articulate, systematic apologist for the kind of extremely deliberate art he has chosen to make (and because, as the most conspicuous artist of his generation, he is the presumed heir to discoveries made by the two older painters), such contentions and defiances as I've been describing must be seated in a historical program, a sequence of progressive, problem-solving advances. Artists, in his view, work primarily according to laws of historical necessity, though those laws are formalist rather than social or materialist ones. (According to this peculiar compound of Marxist inevitability and evolutionary progress, representationalism will eventually disappear.) But for artists like Cézanne and Matisse, and for viewers engaged in the same search for an imagining of primal innocence and the consequences of its loss, there is no history, at least not the mechanistic kind proposed by Stella. There is only consciousness, in its constant present moment, groping always through and toward the nature it is a part of and the life of forms that absorbs all pasts. I think this is why a rigorous formalist critic like Clement Greenberg regards Matisse as one of our greatest artists. But an *artist* who views the past as a series of determinist formal problems is bound to produce an art of merely strategic surprise, where pictorial expression can only be an image of the artist's overstudied intentions.

In some of his late works, Cézanne left exposed sections of the canvas or paper, not as marginal fields to crop the colored areas but as active compositional units. In a few of those still lifes and landscapes, the flatness

2 Petulance fueled by unlimited capital combined with Dr. Alfred Barnes's often shrewd and daring tastes (shaped in part by his advisors William Glackens and John Dewey) to produce one of the great and certainly the most idiosyncratic collections of early modern art. Because it was meant to serve not as a museum but as a study center (and showpiece of Dr. Barnes's educational theories) the standard gallery arrangements—by period, geography, or artist—are broken up into what Dr. Barnes called "wall-pictures," whereby a Renoir, for instance, will be flanked by a Tintoretto and a Giorgione in order, as one of the Foundation documents explains, "to foster understanding of objective investigation and to help in demonstrating the principles of aesthetics."

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of the exposed surface buckles toward and into the painted area. Each brushstroke thus becomes a skirmish with the sculptural encroachments of emptiness. Landscape painting did not interest Matisse, but his still lifes and interiors have, by contrast, an aloof depthlessness. *His* reply to the historical situation described by Stella—namely, the collapse of illusionist depth—was to create a surface not built up but spread out as sheeted scalings. That's why his colors so often look either rolled or paved, as in the magnificent fields of *The Red Studio* and *Harmony in Red,* or else diaphanous, shaken loose, as in *Three Sisters.* He was not interested in following Cézanne by making images out of the geologic accretions of line and color. Matisse's way of making images was, more than any other modern painter's, a tentative unsentimental detachment of compositional elements. *The Moorish Screen,* for example, from 1921, displays the familiar contents of Matisse's interiors: table, books, open violin case, human figure, elaborately ornamented screens and carpets, all disinterestedly made available to us on the plane of the canvas. For all his religious feelings, Matisse, unlike Cézanne, did not *offer up* the contents of his pictures to the gaze of consciousness. All those items have a decorative purpose in the room, and as painted images they are decorations on the canvas. But absorbed into the cool deployment of those artifacts is the emotion Matisse was trying to image: the expectation that out of the coincidence of familiar objects a fused whole may suddenly result, where relations among things are dissolved into immediate undifferentiated erotic presence.

In Matisse's late years these separations and expectations become both more drastic and more playful. His career was not summative or recapitulative. Like Shakespeare's late plays beginning with *Antony and Cleopatra,* with its breakneck velocities and wiry, brittle language, Matisse's late works are not so much a culmination of what he had already done as they are an even more inventive testing of the limits of structure and idiom. When he paints *The Rococo Chair* (1946) and *Still Life with Pomegranates* (1947), he is still the painter of the sacramental stillness of domestic furnishings. But the saturated and diluted color fields of his earlier work here are defied by muscular green canals of color powering through the chair's arms and legs and by the diluvial congestiveness of the ochre upholstery. Each pigment stream is banked, *drawn in,* by white edges; the colorist energies surging against them are palpable. The expansive force is intensified by the violent cropping of the image: our gaze is not allowed to take in the wholeness of the decorative artifact. What matters is its cool, impassioned incompleteness. In the still life, a plate of pomegranates and scattered fruit lies on a table up from which rise two columns, a drape and shutter, which form the right margin of a window. In the window—or, more properly, *upon* it—is worked a pictorial gesture, from an artist who would soon no longer have sufficient physical energy to continue painting, comparable in magnitude to the lifted planes of *The Italian Woman* thirty-two years earlier. Leaves and branches burst like boreal streamers from a white core. The consolidations of the natural world, a tree's physicality, are blown into the isolated exaltations of those darting green forms. Nature's erased consistencies are entirely replaced by Matisse's iconographic poetry: the showering green of the nonexistent tree upon the window answers the blackened scarlet pips of the one split pomegranate, Persephone's fruit, the seeds of which weighed her down; and from the sexual inertia of her underworld existence she rises yearly in vernal plentitude. In paintings of the Madonna and Child by Fra Lippo Lippi, Botticelli, and others, the pomegranate was the sign of restoration held by the Christ child. In Matisse's image, the sign of vernal return, of the overcoming of sexual inertia, is the rootless, trunkless spray of green leaves painted as decorations upon that window.

As he got older, the more clearly Matisse perceived erotic relations the more serenely poised and separate became the images ex-

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pressive of those relations. One of the great works of his old age is *Nude with Oranges* (1953). Decoration is here refined to its purest properties. The central axis is a female nude executed in thickly brushed India ink outline; suspended around the figure are the planetary oranges, two on the right, one on the left. The nude is drawing reduced to its most gestural, denotative force. We see the lineaments, the act of attention in the turned but featureless head, the slope of the belly toward the groin, which is half-tucked behind the forward thigh. The paper-cutout oranges are sculpted, kiln-fired color, the nearest Matisse could come to infusing thing-life into the quality of color. The nude drawing shares its field with pure color. The center of the invisible triangle that the eye draws between the oranges is the figure's enfolded sex. The four images are inviolably separate but just as inviolably joined in the erotic relation created by that anonymous, shared blank support. It is the most serene image Matisse produced of the pleasurable desolating feeling of the incompleteness of all perfectly formed desire.

Martha Armstrong

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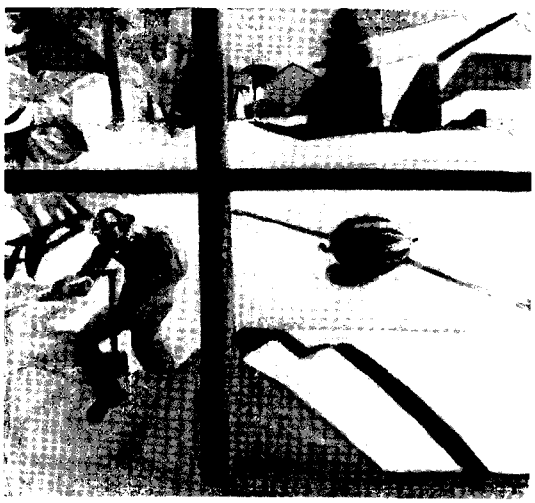
May 27 — June 15



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Professor Hartman reconstructs Paul de Man

by Roger Kimball

The recent revelation that in the early 1940s—at the very moment when Hitler's conquest of Europe seemed assured—the celebrated literary critic Paul de Man wrote well over one hundred articles and reviews for Belgian newspapers sympathetic to the Nazi cause has sent shock waves through the academic literary community. The response has shuttled between extreme consternation and incredulity, but so far most of the responses from within the academy can be grouped under the general heading of "damage control." Perhaps the single most extraordinary—not to say egregious—attempt at damage control to date appeared in the March 7 issue of *The New Republic.* Entitled "Blindness and Insight" after the title of Professor de Man's influential 1971 collection of essays, this exercise in critical legerdemain was written by Professor de Man's former colleague, Geoffrey H. Hartman, the Karl Young Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Yale University and himself a still-glittering cynosure of academic fashion.

In order to understand why Professor Hartman should have troubled to provide the readers of *The New Republic* with this long and elaborate apologia for Paul de Man's early writings, we must understand that Paul de Man was no ordinary college professor. Having come to the United States as an unknown translator and journalist after the war in 1947, he did graduate work at Harvard in the early Fifties and emerged in the mid-Seventies as one of the most sought-after literary theorists in the country. Indeed, by the time he died in 1983 at the age of sixty-five, Professor de Man was considered by some to be one of the most brilliant critical minds of his generation.

With the possible exception of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida—who deserves credit (if that is the word) for being the chief theoretical architect of deconstruction—Professor de Man did more than anyone to institutionalize the "demythologizing" tenets of deconstruction in the literature departments of American universities. During his years teaching at Johns Hopkins and, later, as Sterling Professor of the Humanities at Yale University, he inspired colleagues and graduate students alike to abandon the methods of traditional literary criticism for the allegedly more rigorous approach of deconstruction—an approach characterized by doctrinaire skepticism and infatuation with the thought that language is always so compromised by metaphor and ulterior motives that a text never means what it appears to mean. By now, Professor de Man's teachings and catch-phrases are parroted in departments of English and comparative literature across the country. While neither the man nor his theories were universally beloved, both inspired fierce devotion from the many partisans of deconstruction, who since his death have been at pains to eulogize his personal virtues as a colleague, teacher, and friend as

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well as to praise his intellectual gifts and scholarly accomplishments.

That this paragon of chic academic achievement should stand revealed as the author of anti-Semitic articles for pro-Nazi publications at the height of Hitler's power has been a major embarrassment for his many epigones. The reason is obvious: the frequently heard charge that deconstruction is essentially nihilistic has now acquired existential support of the most damaging kind. Not that those early anti-Semitic articles exactly *prove* that deconstruction is nihilistic; but it is a rum thing when the patron saint of a literary movement that has so arrogantly proclaimed itself a champion of freedom is brutally exposed as having trafficked with a political force whose very essence was the denial of freedom.

Any detailed assessment of Professor de Man's early career must await publication of the relevant documents. At the moment only a handful of excerpts from his journalistic activities in the Forties are circulating. This lack is due to be at least partially remedied this spring when an English translation of his early articles in Flemish, together with the text of his numerous articles in French, is scheduled to appear with notes and commentary in a special issue of *The Oxford Literary Review*. But already it is clear that whatever remorse or chagrin Professor de Man's admirers experienced has been completely overshadowed by a concerted effort at creative exculpation—that is to say, at damage control.

Judging by the flurry of articles and testimonials that have appeared to date, the exercise proceeds roughly as follows: 1) Yes, it's regrettable that Paul de Man wrote those articles, but after all, he was very young at the time, only in his early twenties: youth is impetuous and often blinded by romantic enthusiasms. 2) It's unfortunate that the prominent newspaper *Le Soir,* where the majority of his early journalistic efforts appeared, should have been openly collaborating with the Nazi line—still, de Man was ambitious and naturally seized the opportunity to write for the prestigious paper; besides, only a few of his articles were explicitly anti-Semitic: most were simply reviews of current cultural events. 3) It's true that he wondered in an article that appeared in March, 1941 ("The Jews in Contemporary Literature") whether Jews "polluted" modern literature, and that he envisioned the establishment of a Jewish colony "isolated from Europe"; we must remember, however, that this was not as vicious as much anti-Semitic writing circulating at the time and that, as far as we know now, he stopped writing for *Le Soir* at the end of 1942, before people knew about the Nazi death camps. 4) While it's lamentable that he never acknowledged his deeds—that he went so far as to claim on at least one occasion that he had been part of the "Belgian resistance" to the Nazis during the War—perhaps his difficulty in coming to terms with his own past helps explain his tough-minded resistance to the bewitchments of language later in life . . .

But, still, besides, however . . . The qualifications proceed to infinity, almost transforming guilt into innocence, or at least so numbing the mind that the distinction between guilt and innocence begins to blur—begins, in good deconstructionist fashion, to seem merely *linguistic,* merely rhetorical, a matter utterly divorced from the demands of moral judgment.

"Strategy" is a word that academic literary critics like to use these days to describe their work—no graduate student or assistant professor merely reads books anymore, he engages in "strategies of textual interpretation"—and it is safe to predict that much effort will be expended constructing strategies to exonerate Professor de Man. Professor Hartman's own strategic contribution is surely one of the most troubling efforts that has yet appeared. Almost everything about his article must give us pause: its place of publication, the identity of its author, and not least its content and implications. For example, what does it mean that *The New Republic*—a journal that under its current editorship has made such a show of castigat-

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ing anti-Semitism and supporting Jewish causes—should publish an essay that coyly fudges the significance of Professor de Man's collaborationist articles by re-interpreting them from the perspective of his later deconstructionist writings? What does it mean that this task should have been undertaken by Geoffrey Hartman? Certainly, one could hardly ask for a better pedigree for the job of moral damage control that Professor Hartman undertook in this article: in addition to his regular academic appointment, he is also an advisory committee member of the Judaic Studies Program at Yale as well as an advisor to the Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at the Yale library. But what does it mean that this man who fled Germany as a child in the late Thirties because (as he put it in a 1985 interview) "of the persecution of the Jews" should now devote his considerable rhetorical skills to arguing that "in the light of what we now know, however, [de Man's] work appears more and more as a deepening reflection on the rhetoric of totalitarianism"? And finally, what does it tell us about the current state of contemporary literary criticism that one of its most distinguished practitioners should be so enthralled with the tenets of deconstruction that he should blithely distill one of this century's most rebarbative historical realities into an example of "linguistic pathos"?

Professor Hartman devotes the first third of his article to a more or less straightforward presentation of the facts, so far as they are known, of Professor de Man's early journalistic career. His account, I believe, is essentially accurate. But his tone—sorrowful rather than outraged—is decidedly exculpatory, and he does everything he can to mitigate the offense. For example, he speaks of "*an* anti-Semitic piece" and the "one" article that "engaged explicitly with the ideology of anti-Semitism." (My emphasis.) Again, we shall have to wait until Professor de Man's articles are published before deciding on Professor Hartman's adamant use of the singular. But suppose he is correct and only one article "engaged explicitly with the ideology of anti-Semitism"—that is, was blatantly anti-Semitic: that still says nothing about those scores of other articles that, simply by virtue of appearing in *Le Soir* in 1940, 1941, and 1942, *implicitly* condoned the Nazis' more explicit brand of anti-Semitism, as well as the policies and programs that were instituted on its behalf.

Professor Hartman admits that his late colleague's "formulations" "show all the marks, and the dangerous implications, of identifying Jews as an alien and unhealthy presence in Western civilization." He admits, too, that given the times, his writings were "more than a theoretical expression of anti-Semitism." (Meaning, perhaps, that a merely "theoretical" expression of anti-Semitism isn't such a bad thing?) What he nowhere acknowledges is the explicit relation those writings bore to the regnant political force of the Nazis. Instead, his basic tack is to console us with the thought that Professor de Man did not behave as badly as he might have done. It is true that he pondered the creation of a "Jewish colony isolated from Europe," but he did not demand the extermination of the Jews; he did hail the rise of National Socialism as the "definite emancipation of a people called upon to exercise, in its turn, a hegemony in Europe," but, according to Professor Hartman, his "relation to fascist ideology was not a simple matter." Moreover, Professor Hartman assures us that, "by the terrible standards of the day," an article like "The Jews in Contemporary Literature" was not really "vulgar anti-Semitic writing" and that it "stands out [from the other collaborationist writings, including those of his uncle, Henri de Man] by its refusal to engage directly with political matters." The idea is, I suppose, that simply not descending to the vicious racial slurs of a Goebbels merits some sort of commendation.

There is something extraordinarily depressing about the spectacle of a scholar of Professor Hartman's distinction and personal history struggling to find extenuating cir-

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cumstances for writings undertaken on behalf of an ideology and a political movement that were bent on his own destruction. But somehow even more depressing is the *way* in which Professor Hartman has chosen to go about his task. For where the first third of his article provides us with an overview of Professor de Man's collaborationist writings, the balance of the piece attempts to rehabilitate Professor de Man by viewing those writings through the lens of deconstruction. The result is a sterling—if not a Sterling Professor's—example of vindication through obfuscation.

Perhaps out of deference to the gravity of the subject, Professor Hartman forbears to indulge his penchant for elaborate, punning word-play in this article. But as in his other critical writings from the past decade or so, he proceeds not so much by argument as by a maddeningly imprecise display of verbal arabesques. Not surprisingly, he begins by defending deconstruction against the charges of its enemies. "Deconstruction is neither nihilistic nor cynical," he writes,

> when it questions whether there exists an arena for testing ideas other than the uncontrollable arena of activist politics; or when it demonstrates that philosophy and literature express the impasse from which ideas spring, as well as those ideas themselves . . . . What is neglected by de Man's critics, who are in danger of reducing all to biography again, is the intellectual power in his later work, the sheer power of critique, whatever its source, that he deploys against the claims of philosophy and theory.

Leaving the particulars of this passage to one side, how does it answer the charge of nihilism or cynicism? Does it provide us with anything more than an unsupported assertion? And as for the vaunted "intellectual power" of de Man's later work, of what does it really consist? Confining ourselves to Professor Hartman's own examples, we learn that "according to de Man, we are always encountering epistemological instabilities, the incompatibility or disjunction between meaning and intent, or between what is stated and the rhetoric or mode of stating it." But this is an insight that any well-educated high school student should have when reflecting for the first time on the way language works. Professor Hartman is certainly correct when he observes that

> those previously suspicious of deconstruction have seized on the revelations. Their sense of deconstruction as morally unsound and politically evasive seems to stand confirmed. They condemn it as untrustworthy because it seeks to avert the reality, and therefore the culpability, of error. That is how they interpret deconstruction's emphasis on the indeterminacy of meaning, and on the complexity of a medium that seems to "speak" us [*sic*] instead of submitting fully to our control.

"Such a judgment is superficial," Professor Hartman assures us, "and divorces deconstruction from its context in the history of philosophy." Really? To begin with, one might observe that one need hardly be a deconstructionist to agree that language refuses to submit "fully to our control." In fact, does anyone who has given language a moment's thought believe that it does? Again, Professor Hartman is right that those critical of deconstruction take exception to its "emphasis on the indeterminacy of meaning." But that of course is the central question: is meaning as expressed in language so indeterminate that we are unable reliably to decipher it? What about the assertion that meaning is indeterminate? Would Professor Hartman say that the meaning of that statement, too, is indeterminate? Like so many deconstructionists, Professor Hartman has rather a dualistic view of the matter. He assumes that if one has not abandoned the belief in the intelligibility of language and adopted the skepticism that deconstruction preaches, one must be a kind of cartoon Cartesian, holding that language is a perfectly transparent medium that renders our thoughts about the world without loss or ambiguity. The possibility of a middle ground between nihilistic skepti-

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cism and naïve belief never seems to occur to him.

And as for deconstruction's "context in the history of philosophy"—well, given Professor Hartman's intractable hostility to anything resembling philosophical analysis, I'm sure it would be amusing to hear him enlighten us about that. As it is, we must be content with his suggestion that deconstruction takes up "the age-old problem" of the relation of language and meaning and his cryptic allusion to the German neo-Kantian philosopher Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer, we are told, "observed that while language wished to overcome 'the curse of mediacy,' it was itself part of the problem it tried to resolve."

Now I doubt that Professor Hartman could have picked a less appropriate figure than Ernst Cassirer to support his brief for deconstruction. Cassirer, another refugee from Hitler's Reich, would be rolling over in his grave if he knew his name was invoked to support the radically skeptical contentions of deconstruction. Reviewing the intellectual climate of the Teens and early Twenties, the philosopher admonished in the foreword to *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms,* his *magnum opus,* that "at times, language seemed to be becoming the principal weapon of skepticism rather than a vehicle of philosophical knowledge"—a remark that stands up rather well as a characterization of deconstruction *avant la lettre.* As he put it later in the same volume, "skepticism seeks to expose the nullity of knowledge and language—but what it ultimately demonstrates is the nullity of the *standard* by which it measures them." That is to say, skepticism exposes the nullity of the standard of absolute transparency, the standard that deconstructionists falsely impute to anyone who continues to believe in the possibility of stable meanings and the intelligibility of language.

But the point is that philosophical analysis is little more than intellectual window dressing for Professor Hartman. In fact, given his view of language, it is *necessarily* little more than intellectual window dressing for the simple reason that he denies the power of language to communicate effectively through concepts. For Professor Hartman, indeed, "concept" is a highly suspect term, implying as it does that thought can meaningfully transcend the particularities of language and rhetoric. This suspicion of philosophy and of the cogency of rational analysis is one of the chief reasons that he values deconstruction so highly. For deconstruction provides a handy way of appearing to transform philosophy into a species of literature, reducing concepts to so many rhetorical "tropes" and viewing the whole notion of truth as an unfortunate fictional construct.

It is in this sense that Professor Hartman can offer deconstruction as a defender of the imagination and literature against the supposedly unimaginative depredations of philosophy and science. "Deconstruction is," he explains,

> a defense of literature. It shows, by close reading, (1) that there are no dead metaphors, (2) that literature is often more self-aware than those who attack it, (3) that literary texts contain significant tensions that can be disclosed, but not resolved, by analysis. Any mode of analysis, therefore, that sees the text as an organic unity, or uses it for a totalizing purpose (as when the right or the left speaks for history), is blind, and the text itself will subvert or "deconstruct" such closures.

There is a great deal that one might say about this passage, which blends the highly questionable with the portentously trite. The idea that there are no dead metaphors can be refuted by anyone who ever uttered the phrase "that depends" and bothered to consider its etymology; I'm not sure what it means to speak of literature *itself* as being "more self-aware than those who attack it," but if Professor Hartman is suggesting that many who attack literature are philistines, who would disagree? And as for the contention that "literary texts contain significant tensions that can be disclosed, but not resolved, by analysis," here I should think it all depends on what he means by "resolved." In one sense, certainly, it is a statement with

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which scarcely a single literate individual would disagree. But the real point of this passage is that deconstruction is superior to other modes of interpretation because it provides especially "close readings" of texts, readings that reveal nasty things like the "totalizing" impulses of authors, i.e., their desire for unity and sense.

But one wonders: is deconstruction better at "close reading" than traditional literary analysis? Let us consider an example of close reading that Professor Hartman cites in his apologia for Professor de Man.

> It is indeed hard to associate the young journalist (aged 21) with the distinguished theorist (aged 47) who wrote so critically, and so effectively, against Husserl's *The Crisis of European Humanity and Philosophy*. De Man accused Husserl of blindly privileging Western civilization ("European supremacy") at the very time (1935) that Europe "was about to destroy itself as center in the name of an unwarranted claim to be the center." But of de Man, too, it can now be said that "as a European it seems that [he] escaped from the necessary self-criticism that is prior to all philosophical truth about the self."

First of all, one might ask, why did Professor Hartman bother to introduce Professor de Man's discussion of this late lecture by the philosopher Edmund Husserl? Surely one reason is that it gives him the opportunity to speak of "blindly privileging Western civilization," a charge that is as common (one might almost say necessary) among fashionable academics these days as the diction is deplorable. But then how "effective" is Professor de Man's own criticism? It is odd, to say the least, that he should charge Husserl with illegitimately "privileging" Western civilization when the main point of the lecture in question was to criticize the "mistaken rationalism" or "objectivism" that in Husserl's view had precipitated a major crisis in Western values —a crisis that he could see unfolding around him in 1935 with the ascension of Hitler and institution of Nazi ideas throughout German society. (Indeed, Husserl, as a Jew, was just then being ostracized from the academic community at Freiburg where he had taught for many years.)

One notes, too, that in the essay to which Professor Hartman refers, Professor de Man archly remarks that "why this geographical expansion [of philosophical reflection] should have chosen to stop, once and forever, at the Atlantic Ocean and the Caucasus, Husserl does not say." But Husserl does not say for the simple reason that he never suggests that the spirit of scientific rationality that he discusses in "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man" (as the lecture is usually translated) *is* bounded "once and forever" by the Atlantic Ocean and the Caucasus. Quite the contrary. Near the beginning of the lecture, he notes that in invoking the spiritual image of Europe he "does not mean Europe geographically, as it appears on maps, as though European man were to be in this way confined to the circle of those who live in this territory. In the spiritual sense it is clear that to Europe belong the English dominions, the United States, etc., but not, however, the Eskimos or Indians of the country fairs, or the Gypsies . . . ." It is a small point, to be sure, but it gives one a good indication of the kind of "close reading" one can expect from our premier deconstructionists.

Of course, Professor Hartman did not treat the readers of *The New Republic* to the *longueurs* of deconstruction simply to provide them with another example of the theory at work. His exposition of the putative virtues of deconstruction was part and parcel of his effort at reconstructing Professor de Man in the face of his early journalistic career. "The discovery of these early articles must make a difference in the way we read the later de Man," Professor Hartman admits.

> The new disclosures imbed a biographical fact in our consciousness, a fact that tends to devour all other considerations; it does not spare the later achievement, whose intellectual power we continue to feel. One crucial and

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> hurtful problem is that de Man did not address his past. We do not have his thoughts. Did he avoid confession . . . and instead work out his totalitarian temptations in a purely intellectual and impersonal manner?

Leaving aside the euphemistic circumlocutions ("imbed a biographical fact in our consciousness," etc.), we may begin by considering the subterfuge contained in Professor Hartman's concluding question—as if the issue were "working out" a "totalitarian temptation." More basically, one might ask: how does Professor Hartman handle the troubling fact that his subject never owned up to his past? Deconstructively, of course. "It is possible to link the intellectual strength of the later work to what is excluded by it, to what, in surging back, threatens to diminish its authority . . . . But the postwar writing may constitute an avowal of error, a kind of repudiation in its very methodology of a philosophy of reading."

What this jewel of opacity would appear to mean is that the critical power of deconstruction provides Professor de Man with an intellectually sophisticated substitute for any mere straightforward "avowal of error." The implication is that in the intellectual empyrean inhabited by Professors de Man, Hartman, and company, one can dispense with anything so pedestrian as a frank admission of guilt; but what this passage really reveals is how the deconstructionist habit of intellectualizing reality results in a deviousness that willingly forsakes the most basic moral distinctions in its pursuit of ever more clever rhetorical constructs. As Professor Hartman explains it, "Even to say, quite simply, 'I was young, I made a mistake, I've changed my mind' remains blind if it overlooks the narrative shape of this or any confession." "Narrative shape"? Reading Professor Hartman's exegesis, it is easy to forget that we are not talking about Keats's "To Autumn" but about a collection of reviews and articles that appeared in pro-Nazi publications. To invoke the "narrative shape" of confession is not to render the issue any clearer or more morally compelling, but merely to insinuate a new element of intellectualized mendacity into the discussion.

And this—the application of ever more sophistical layers of intellectualized mendacity—is what is finally most troubling about Professor Hartman's essay. While he began with Paul de Man's numerous contributions to collaborationist newspapers, by his second or third page Professor Hartman has transformed the entire discussion into a debate about language. "De Man always asks us to look beyond natural experience or its mimesis to a specifically linguistic dilemma. He claims that the relation between meaning and language is not in our subjective control, perhaps not even human." The idea being—what? That since we are to look beyond "natural experience" to a "linguistic dilemma," and since language is reputedly not under our control, we are not therefore responsible for the blunders and evil we perpetrate in the realm of "natural experience"? Does it mean that we are henceforth relieved of the obligation to speak and write straightforwardly about such blunders?

In order to get the full flavor of Professor Hartman's style of thought, it is worth quoting his exposition at some length. "There is no compensation for the failure of action in the perfection of art," he writes, musing on the relation between art and action in Professor de Man's later writings.

> The fields of critical philosophy, literary theory, and history have an interlinguistic, not an extralinguistic, correlative; they are secondary in relation to the original, which is itself a previous text. They reveal an essential failure of disarticulation, which was already there in the original. "They kill the original, by discovering that the original was already dead. They read the original from the perspective of pure language [*reine Sprache*], a language that would be entirely freed of the illusion of meaning."

"Interlinguistic," you understand, not "extralinguistic": in other words, in Professor Hartman's view, neither philosophy nor literary theory nor even history refers to the

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real world (i.e., has an "extralinguistic correlative"). How comforting to know that the atrocities we read about are merely literary phenomena, referring not to the sufferings of real people, real "originals," but only to "a previous text"!

Professor Hartman goes on to tell us that

> [t]his talk of killing the original, and of essential failure, is strong stuff. Knowing today about the writings of the young de Man, it is not possible to evade them as merely a biographical reference point: the early writing *is* an "original" to which the later writing reacts. De Man's method of reading implies that the relation between late and early is interlinguistic only, that the position he had abandoned, one that proved to be a failure and perhaps culpably blind, is not to be used to explain his eventual method; but the biographical disclosure may hurt de Man's intelligibility. Though his method insists on excluding the biographical ("extralinguistic") reference, I do not believe that we can read him without identifying the "original" in his case as the mediated and compromised idiom of his early, journalistic writings. . . .
>
> The earlier self is not off the hook, but the emphasis shifts to the way language operates. The later self acknowledges an error, yet it does not attribute it to an earlier self . . . because that would perpetuate its blindness to the linguistic nature of the predicament.

"The linguistic nature of the predicament"? This is the culmination of Professor Hartman's extraordinary display? What does it mean to describe Professor de Man's "predicament" as "linguistic"? If nothing else, it is to suggest that the historical reality of his involvement with *Le Soir* and the other fascist papers was at bottom a kind of linguistic, not a moral, lapse. And note, too, Professor Hartman's conjecture that "the biographical disclosure may hurt de Man's intelligibility," when what is at stake is not his "intelligibility" (which remains untouched by the disclosure of his early writings) but his character. It is symptomatic of the real blindness of deconstruction that it should fail to have any insight whatsoever into this fundamental distinction.

Professor Hartman concludes his essay with the assertion that "de Man's critique of every tendency to totalize literature or language, to see unity where there is no unity, looks like a belated, but still powerful, act of conscience." The idea we are asked to accept in this statement is that by practicing literary deconstruction Professor de Man effectively came to terms with his journalistic service to a Nazi-inspired anti-Semitism. Not only does this defy our credulity, but to my mind Professor Hartman's claim, as well as the editorial decision to publish it, is a stunningly blunt failure of moral and intellectual conscience.

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Poems *by Donald Justice, Rachel Hadas, Richard Foerster & Margaret Barringer*

Dance lessons of the Thirties

Wafts of old incense mixed with Cuban coffee
Hung on the air; a fan turned; it was summer.
And (of the buried life) some last aroma
Still clung to the tumbled cushions of the sofa.

At lesson time, pushed back, it used to be
The thing we managed always just to miss
With our last-second dips and twirls—all this
While the Victrola wound down gradually.

And this was their exile, those brave ladies who taught us
So much of art, and stepped off to their doom
Demonstrating the foxtrot with their daughters
Endlessly around a sad and makeshift ballroom—

O little lost Bohemias of the suburbs!

—Donald Justice

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Bedtime

How can I put you down?

Nightly you must negotiate alone
fluorescent escalators, straddle
banisters gleaming neon
and noiselessly slide down.

How can I tell you 'sleep'?

Nightly the body yearns to recreate
its lost polarity, the shape
of love unrealized, some
unborn, forgotten mate.

How can I let you cry?

Nightly you must move on
toward that point where all roads come
together into one
lost just as it touches the horizon.

How can I shut the door?

Nightly you must go through
so many dark arcades
and come back whole
clutching each morning's clue.

—Rachel Hadas

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Sunset sestina

Like symphonic melodies, they unhinge,
return remade. I'd have them delight
with sameness and change. When daily
the sun diminuendos, flames the coast
of Maine, eases, teases with certainties,
I'd believe any going blazons bright at coda.

Today the sun's tinge tickles the curls, singes
the breakers, shudders windows and delights
like cymbal-shimmer. The lobster boats that daily
heave green-hulled delve, then coast
glissando back to port. Their V'd certainties
wing aft, and gulls, like pink iotas,

imprint the impressionable sky with their daily
accusations. Now gluttonous shadows delight
at feasts, grow fat in corners, and the eye must coast
upward like a rising curtain. Tree-

tops, rooftops strain at alpenglow. The daily
drift slips like string through fingers. The delight-
ful balloon climbs on sighs of remorse, boasts

of wonder. How untiringly I crane after these daily
departures, nature's scheduled flights.

Night after night their dark notes assail me.

—*Richard Foerster*

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Analemma

for my father

The screen of the porch door whitens with a wash of brine.
Beyond the house, afternoon angles into the garden greens,
Exposes the sycamore's viscous blue risen veins.
On the windowsill inside, where you traced the sun's design
As it flowed through a hole in the center of a playing card
Flush on the window, the two elliptical circles it made
Reduced the year to one comprehensible size,
Which is all that's left of you in this inability of mine
To remember your life among the presence of other men,
When I hide the memory of you under horizonless skies;
Or when I try to remember how you looked on that afternoon,
Years ago, that look in your worn eyes as you tried to define
The world by cradling the petal of a pink wild rose
In your palm: all I can see in my mind is the hard
Flesh of your hands and my flesh when I was a child,
Blushed as the rose, aching to reach up and to grasp on
With the instinctive demands of a child for those
Moments when two bodies are circles of light made whole,
Intersticed with light's slow thick cyclical flow.

Now I move through this house, through all its open doors,
Through a late light that holds the dark floors, until
Under the mirror above the table in the front hall,
I find the keys on the old keychain that you used
When you came here to watch the waves rise and fall
Like the belly of a woman in the water's wash and swell.
I finger the chain's little silver balls,
Go again to the porch to stand on the weathered boards
That overhang lengths of seaweed that lie limp and brown
On flanks of sand and watch the sun in one ethereal throb
Deliver itself of its sulphurous afternoon,
A bulge of black horizon disgorge a glimmering new moon.

—*Margaret Barringer*

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Letter from Paris

Obituaries and retrospectives

by Jed Perl

With a bit of falling snow, the Seine looks exactly like a winter scene by Albert Marquet. But it didn't snow for very long in Paris when I was there this past February, temperatures were good enough for aimless strolling, and the sky was as marvelously changeable as in May, going in a moment from oyster gray to delicate smoky blue.

I arrived in Paris a week after "Le Dernier Picasso" had opened at the Pompidou Center, and went over to the museum on my first evening—it stays open until ten. A good-sized crowd was moving slowly through the big show of work from Picasso's last twenty years, and there was drama to the occasion. Only now, fifteen years after Picasso's death, has his late work finally arrived in strength in the city he came to nearly ninety years ago. I was glad to be in Paris for the occasion. I'd been in Europe in the summer of 1970, when the late Picasso paintings were first shown at the Palais des Papes in Avignon, but had been too immersed in an eighteen-year-old's opaque misery to know or care. It was a decade before I got back to France—older and, I trust, better able to seize what came my way. There were still opportunities for contact with the generations that had made Paris the first city of twentieth-century art. My wife, the painter Deborah Rosenthal, admires André Masson's work enormously, and in 1980 she managed to arrange a visit with him, and I got to sit there and listen, despite my inadequate French, to a conversation that Deborah had been led to expect might last an hour but which actually stretched through an afternoon. That visit remains vivid in the imagination—a thimbleful of real time passed with a figure out of history. When, a few years later, Deborah and I met Jean Hélion, he seemed like an old friend from the moment we said hello to him, probably because we'd already heard so much about him from his old friends in New York. In the Eighties, Hélion was battling failing health and (the artist's ultimate nightmare) failing eyesight; but there was still his warmth and eloquence and generosity, and the hours spent with him will remain forever bright.

Now Masson and Hélion are gone. They died in Paris late in October, within a day of one another. At the time this coincidence struck many of their friends and admirers as strange and perhaps even unfortunate. Surely Masson and Hélion each deserved to have the obituary page to himself—two such important deaths were more than many of us could take in. Since the Fifties, Masson and Hélion had seen something of one another and had had a number of friends in common; yet temperamentally they were very, very different. No neat message could be extracted from their deaths just hours apart; still, there we were, confronting all at once the ends of the last great representatives of not one but two periods—the Twenties and the Thirties. Their obituaries are part of the history of the past half century. André Masson:

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1896, born near Senlis in the Île-de-France; 1924-28, plays a central role in the early years of Surrealism as the inventor of automatic drawing; 1929, defects from the circle of arch-Surrealist André Breton to the renegade camp of Georges Bataille; during World War II lives in exile in America, where his calligraphic style makes a deep impression on the young American painters; 1945, returns to France, takes up residence in Provence, and begins a re-investigation of Impressionism. Jean Hélion: 1904, born in the Norman village of Couterne; 1930-31, joins forces with Van Doesburg, Arp, and others to form the Abstraction-Création group; in the mid-1930s gains a reputation among the international avant-garde with his geometric compositions; 1936, takes up residence in the United States; returns to France in 1940 to fight with the French, is taken prisoner, spends almost two years in German prison camps, escapes in 1942 and returns to America, where he writes a best-seller about his experiences, *They Shall Not Have Me*; 1945-50, makes a famous stylistic about-face and emerges in postwar Paris at the forefront of the return to realism.

In Paris in February modern art seemed old, and also unsure of itself. The last of Picasso—the work that had been a giant question mark when he died—filled the top floor of the Pompidou Center, and people were still laughing in surprise and embarrassment at the pornographic plates of *Suite 347,* his enormous print cycle from 1968. On the floor below, the curators in charge of the permanent collection of France's Museum of Modern Art had given over one room each to Masson and Hélion. The selections were spotty. I cringed at the thought that anyone might judge these artists on the basis of what was hanging here. Masson and Hélion, two of the least understood figures of the century, departed this earth with their reputations still unresolved. And Picasso remains a controversial figure.

"Le Dernier Picasso" is the third major museum show to be devoted to Picasso's final phase.[1] A joint effort of Pompidou, the Musée Picasso, and the Tate Gallery in London, the show departs from the format taken at the Kunstmuseum in Basel in 1981 and at the Guggenheim in New York in 1984 by surveying not the last ten but the last twenty years of Picasso's life. I happen to believe that there remains much in Picasso's output between the end of World War II and 1965 that hasn't yet been properly appreciated, and so the prospect of the first half of the Pompidou show was interesting to me. Unfortunately, the curators—Marie-Laure Bernadac, Isabelle Monod-Fontaine, and David Sylvester—haven't really taken up the challenge of the Fifties; the lion's share of the work on view dates from after 1965. The show pretty much follows the idea of John Richardson—who is working on a comprehensive biography of Picasso—that Picasso's two decades with Jacqueline Roque form a distinct period in his life. This period is seen as culminating in the explosion of work that extends from *Suite 347* in 1968 through the paintings of 1971. We still need a major show that focuses on Picasso's development between 1945 and 1960. The opening galleries at Pompidou give some sense of how rewarding the postwar Picasso can be; they also suggest why this phase of Picasso's development poses a challenge to establishment taste.

The very late work of Picasso has gained broad acceptance in recent years because its rambunctiousness looks avant-garde. "Le Dernier Picasso" demonstrates how Picasso arrived at his final, anti-architectonic style by systematically dismantling the late-Cubist style he'd been committed to in the early Fifties. There's a growing transatlantic consensus that Picasso remained to the end an artist who knew exactly what he was up to. Contemporary taste has turned the Expressionist of 1970 into an acceptable figure; but the orthodox Cubist of 1955 remains

1 "Le Dernier Picasso" is on display at the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris through May 16. From there it travels to the Tate Gallery in London, where it will be on view from June 23 through September 18.

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little remarked or understood. Beware of those who believe in one "real" Picasso: if we've learned anything by now, it's that Picasso's reality lies in the way he becomes himself in the process of taking on a variety of stylistic disguises. If Picasso was knowingly defying all conventions when he created such rhapsodic scrawls as the *Maternité* of 1971, he was knowingly accepting all the conventions when he painted a long series of interiors in the Fifties.

These interiors are a shock when you come on them in the first room at the Pompidou Center. Particularly in *Nu dans l'atelier* (1953), Picasso is taking upon himself the congested, academic structure we know from the work of André Lhote and Marcel Gromaire. Academic Cubism has a way of dealing with the world. Every time a form turns or two forms overlap, the design is forced to the surface—and Picasso's surface, like those of Gromaire and Lhote, is a tight, congested grid. If I read the oil paintings of the period 1950-1960 correctly, Picasso is saying, "Maybe there's some life left in academic Cubism." One must remember that Picasso, unlike Braque, hadn't consistently designed pictures in an overall Cubist manner: the portraits of the Thirties and the Forties are extensions of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*'s distorted figures, not of *Ma Jolie*'s wholesale re-organization of space. But for the spectacle of the South of France—the gardens and salons of La Californie (his villa in Cannes) and the Riviera landscape beyond—a canonical Cubism seemed appropriate. And Picasso found much life left within a mode of construction that by the Fifties reeked of musty "School of Paris" perfume. In *Nu dans l'atelier* and the La Californie interiors of 1956 the tightness of the space is inventively and surprisingly established. The shuttling back and forth between highly abstracted and highly naturalistic details—which Lhote had turned into a cold mannerism—is renewed. The exotic brazier on the floor, the seductive nude reclining on the couch, add piquancy to the overall design.

"Le Dernier Picasso" hints, in its first galleries, at a lyric side of the Fifties Picasso that has yet to be fully revealed. In these paintings we encounter aspects of the world that Picasso isn't supposed to know about: dark shadows in the crowded atelier; doves nestling on a wrought-iron balcony; stucco houses built like tiny fortresses on sun-drenched hills. It's inevitable that our museum curators, who are insensitive to much of the lyricism of modern French art—for example, the paintings of Dufy and Marquet—should be reluctant to exhibit the smaller Picassos of the Fifties. Yet there's surely more of quality in these cabinet-sized Picassos—with their reminiscences of Renoir and the trecento—than in the dry, overcalculated variations on Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* which are always trotted out when something of Picasso's from the mid-Fifties is felt to be needed. (They're included in "Le Dernier Picasso.") Too little is made of Picasso's gentleness—the gentleness that we encounter in the Rose period, and in the neoclassicism of the years around World War I, and again in the Fifties.

An output with the vast dimensions of Picasso's can easily swamp us; selections must be made. But sometimes selections are made and they turn out to be the wrong ones. Two of the largest paintings in "Le Dernier Picasso"—*Femme nue sous un pin* and *Le Buffet de Vauvenargues,* both 1959-60—are monumental bores. This pair of behemoths, a reclining nude and a domestic interior, have no intrinsic interest, nor do they hint at where Picasso is going. When we're unsure of Picasso's intentions, one useful guide is the paintings that the artist or those close to him believed had a special significance. As a guide to the artist's development between the Fifties and the *Suite 347* in 1968, the paintings in the collection of Michel and Louise Leiris are especially revealing. (They were given to the French state in 1984.) Louise Leiris (Picasso's dealer for decades) and Michel Leiris (the celebrated anthropologist and Surrealist writer) probably knew Picasso as well as anybody, and two works from their collection in "Le Dernier Picasso"—*Femme couchée sur un divan bleu* (1960) and *Le Peintre et son*

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modèle dans l'atelier (1963)—show Picasso discovering, in his late seventies and early eighties, new forms of spontaneity. In *Femme couchée,* Picasso takes command of the rectangle with a casual confidence that he isn't always capable of in those years; the figure unfolds out of the lines of the brush, prefiguring the sketch-like lucidity of the 1968-71 period. *Le Peintre et son modèle dans l'atelier,* in hot pink and spring green, also conveys a new freedom, a foretaste of things to come. This little studio interior, one of a long line of interiors from the Sixties, is a masterpiece of the postwar period. The artist, seated at the left behind an easel, is fixated on the model who reclines on a divan all the way to the right. Here Picasso's whiplash brushstrokes fling us from left to right and back again. The space is tight yet elastic, as if everything were attached to everything else by gigantic rubber bands. That rubbery line of Picasso's is a comic line—it constructs both the artist's bulbous profile and the teeny-weeny reclining model; but there's also something metaphysical to the comedy, because the same line that makes form breaks form. In spite of the unnatural, zany color Picasso employs here, the artist's workroom is ominously shadowy.

Le Peintre et son modèle dans l'atelier is Picasso in full control of his powers; Picasso does keep hitting it until the end. But of course there are also plenty of clinkers. With late Picasso, one can either take the worst paintings as a baseline and dare the artist to do better; or grant him the best ones and see the others as a falling off. At one time or another I've taken both approaches; at "Le Dernier Picasso" I was on Picasso's side—the rhythm of the latter part of the show put me there. Several small rooms packed with the marvelous erotic contortions of his prints led into two large, squarish galleries tightly hung with a selection of the paintings that were first shown at the Palais des Papes in Avignon in 1970 and 1973. There are prints and paintings in which Picasso's controlled excess brings forth a new electricity, as well as works that are vague or spotty, dashed off too fast. Yet

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it's by no means easy to say when too little is too little. *Personnage rembranesque et amour* (1969), with a blurred effect that may derive from Picasso's experiments with aquatint, gives us very little to grab onto and yet is wonderful, delicately hallucinogenic. The sea-green *Maternité* (1971), from the Musée Picasso, which is one of my favorites among the late works, is another quick painting. At Pompidou, *Maternité* was joined by some other amazing sea-green visions: *Homme à la flûte et enfant,* done the day before *Maternité* (they made a pair at Avignon in 1973); a melancholy, bust-length *Femme au repos* (1971); and *Homme écrivant* (1971), a head of a man drawn in jumpy calligraphic strokes that seem to be derived from Carolingian manuscript painting. When one is in these last rooms at Pompidou the effect of the ensemble can be overwhelming: gathered together, Picasso's gaping faces have an aura that gives even the lesser works a lift. Is it romantic to feel generous toward Picasso's failures? Perhaps, but I don't imagine that our experience of these late paintings can be separated from a certain mood of romance.

The curators of "Le Dernier Picasso" have found a convincing way to close the show. They do include the 1971 pastel self-portrait of the artist as a skull that was on the cover of the Guggenheim catalogue, but this still strikes me as more self-pitying than self-revelatory. Three very late ink drawings of female nudes provide the shock waves that the self-portrait only promises. This makes sense, since Woman, not the Self-Portrait, was the subject through which Picasso most often revealed himself. In the three reclining nudes from August 18, October 3, and October 5, 1972, all the voluptuous curves of the year before are gone. For once Picasso is drawing like an old man, with uncertain, broken strokes. The anatomy has sunk into itself. You can barely tell an arm from a leg in the shriveled remains of the female figure; these women look like beat-up old pieces of Victorian furniture. In doing his final nudes, Picasso may have been thinking of the erotic fantasies that Masson included in his album *Anatomy of My Universe* in 1938 —it wouldn't surprise me if Picasso, at the very end, was still cannibalizing others to enrich his own expressive range. It doesn't surprise me, either, that at the end Picasso finds something new. And that his wit—reflected in the way he turns the top of the "2" in 1972 into a tightly wound spiral—is there to give a comic twist to the baffled bitterness.

Each encounter we have with a painting is self-contained; returning to the same work a week or a month or a year later, something that moved us may not move us, or may move us more. Over the years, you may come to believe in some encounters more than in others. Losing interest in a work or an artist, you may still choose to believe in the experience you had, or your enthusiasm may be tempered, subtly transformed. When I think of Picasso's *Maternité,* it's at the end of the Museum of Modern Art retrospective of 1980 (where it first came together for me) rather than at the Musée Picasso (where I've mostly struggled to regain that first experience). I did regain the experience at Pompidou—and so it is with paintings.

With artists like André Masson and Jean Hélion, whose work we can't rely on seeing regularly, we're even more dependent on the slow accretion of experiences: the gallery show of such-and-such a year; the selection of works that hung in a museum at such-and-such a time. You have to contend with spotty and poor showings. You have to have the courage to trust in the impressions you've built up over the years. And you have to recognize the point at which the evidence has gone overwhelmingly in favor of the artist.

Nothing in the climate of the past twenty —no, forty—years has really helped us to respond to André Masson. Though he died with his name firmly established in the history books, the image of a pioneering Surrealist or a guru of the Abstract Expressionists fits imperfectly with a body of work that consists mostly of smallish, complexly colored paintings which encompass a vast range of themes, motifs, and ideas. Masson,

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who came from Brussels to Paris in 1912 at the age of sixteen, saw Cubism as a permission to do all kinds of things. Even his essential Surrealist paintings of the Twenties—the sand paintings, with their bare canvas and straggling red, blue, and black lines—are related to the idea of a painting as a literary emblem, something which had been rather rare in twentieth-century French art. (The literary side of Masson's work is what first endeared him to the Surrealists.) In a sense we ought to be ready for Masson, because we're in a period that's eager to question the idea that less is more in modern art; but Masson's work is both so various and so self-contained as to repel casual curiosity. It takes a considerable effort to untangle his complex relations with Symbolism and Impressionism, with Greek mythology and Japanese religion.

My own introduction to Masson came at the shows at the Lerner-Heller Gallery on Madison Avenue in 1972 and 1973. (Taking the catalogue from the 1973 show off the shelf, I'm shocked to discover it was that long ago.) The works I remember best aren't from Masson's "classic" period in the Twenties; they're the wonderful, unexpected Massons: the 1939 *Hôtel des Oiseaux,* in delicate blue-gray washes, with strange birdlike creatures playing out some murderous narrative in a seedy French hotel; the 1955 *Migration,* with tiny calligraphic forms, emblems of the shifting populations of wartime, flung across a dark ground; the 1972-73 *Le vainqueur de Méduse,* in lurid red and blue, a blood-dripping classical hero with a hand in the place of his head and a face in the place of his genitals. Looking at the Lerner-Heller catalogue today, I realize that part of the excitement of *Le vainqueur de Méduse* was in the thought, "My goodness, he's still at work."

What endeared Masson to me back in the early Seventies was how much he permitted himself—how, for example, he could go from the dark, burnt-orange world of his American oils of the Forties to the light, translucent landscapes he painted in Provence in the Fifties. Unfortunately, the selec-

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tion of Massons on view at Pompidou in February made his variety look like incoherence. One of the most important paintings on display was *La Résistance* (1944), a dark, swirling labyrinth of separate yet interrelated spaces that clearly deserved better than the catch-as-catch-can installation it received. In *La Résistance* Masson represents the struggles of World War II as if they were episodes in a strange storybook—the secret meetings, the telegraph messages, the heroes, and, at the center, Notre Dame, symbol of France. No single view is enough to establish a judgment on such a painting, because its method, a semi-abstract narrative combining elements of fantasy and current events, is so unfamiliar. The mood of this—and of almost all Massons—is melancholic, saturnine. The artist's shining intelligence—his great stock of ideas—can seem a terrible tragic burden when he's living through a period of skepticism about the painting of ideas. I don't know if I believe in *La Résistance*; but I do believe in the career that produced it. When one enters Masson's imagination, there's much that's delicate and gentle to be found. Masson, in the urban-apocalyptic works of the Thirties and Forties, as well as in the nostalgic pastoral works of the Fifties and Sixties, is the most Blakean of modern painters.

The Masson retrospective organized by William Rubin at the Museum of Modern Art in 1976 was a noble attempt to bring this complicated career before American audiences. That the show failed to register in New York is testimony to the difficulty of implanting an alien sensibility on these shores. Mounted in one large room at the east end of the museum (a room which was swept away in the 1983-84 building program), the retrospective was too various for American audiences. When an artist has as many periods and as many manners as Masson, it's perhaps ultimately impossible to take them all in in one swallow. What is actually an evolution over time can seem congested, confused. This is, I believe, one of the difficulties in presenting Masson—and also Hélion—to American audiences. The irony here is that both Masson and Hélion spent time in America around World War II and had an effect on American artists. But perhaps by now their American connection works against them, because we think we understand them, when in fact vast tracts of their work remain unknown.

The career of Jean Hélion is only seen in bits in America—and usually the bits are minor or inferior. From the various shows mounted in New York City during the past fifteen years one can gather that Hélion began as a geometric abstractionist in the Thirties, that he moved through a period of abstracted figuration in the Forties to the detailed realism of the Fifties, and that in the Sixties and Seventies this gave way to the telegraphic, brightly colored manner of the figure compositions and still lifes of his final years. In discussing his own work, Hélion often spoke of its extraordinary range in terms of an effort to embrace the full spectrum of human experience; he was fond of saying that reality contains abstraction—and vice versa. I suppose I used to find Hélion's statements a little incredible. From the perspective of contemporary New York, where all serious art is terribly embattled and where we can scarcely imagine anything but the most highly focused efforts as succeeding, this Frenchman can seem crazily optimistic. And yet it's Hélion's marvelous optimism that ties together everything he ever did, from the first abstractions—full of an idealist's hope for a bright, clear, new world—to the scenes of parks and city streets, in which Hélion's fascination with all the details carries an it's-wonderful-to-be-alive message. A long journey separates *Circular Tensions* (1931-32), with its rather severe curving forms poised against a flat white ground, from *La Grande Mannequinerie* (1951), with its bedraggled poet asleep in the gutter; but for the artist whom one visited in Paris in the Eighties all styles existed simultaneously within the dream logic of the imagination. In some of Hélion's very last paintings men of flesh and blood collide with the geometric solids of abstract art.

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The Hélions on display at the Pompidou Center in February included a wonderful painting from 1979-80 entitled *The Exhibition of 1934.* Here the old artist recalls a vernissage of his youth: seven figures, some carrying flowers which they probably mean to give to the artist, fill a smallish room hung with Hélion's abstract compositions. The high-keyed greens that Hélion favored in his later work bounce across the surface, lending this intricate painting the loose-limbed rhythm of a musical-comedy number. A few galleries away at Pompidou, a series of exhibition cases were devoted to *Abstraction-Création,* the avant-garde magazine of which Hélion was an editor in the Thirties. The curators at the Pompidou didn't make a connection between the two displays, but at least Hélion, early and late, was represented in Paris's premier showcase of modern art. Over on the Left Bank, at a small new gallery called Art of This Century, there was a modest but impressive memorial show. This brought to mind Hélion's Peggy Guggenheim connection: the gallery is run by Nicolas Hélion, one of the sons Hélion had with Peggy Guggenheim's daughter Pegeen, and is of course named after her mother's legendary New York gallery, where Hélion, among others, exhibited. At the new Art of This Century one could revisit the motifs and obsessions of a magnificent artist—the open windows, nudes, pumpkins, top hats, umbrellas, and street scenes that had enriched Hélion's art for half a century. Just outside the door of the little space on the rue Visconti the life of Paris that had nourished Hélion went on. Among those of us in America who admire Hélion there is now only one question: when will he be granted the major museum retrospective that his career so richly deserves?

In a 1980 tribute to Hélion the poet Francis Ponge actually linked Hélion and Masson when he commented that "Hélion's powerful personality, his passionate eloquence, his way of explaining himself in front of his pictures, is comparable, all other things being equal, to André Masson." The ebullience of Hélion's art is worlds removed

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from Masson's introspective mood, and yet their lives, ending so close together, do raise similar challenges for interpretation. Both lived a long time, and weren't afraid to go off in different directions, employ different manners. They enjoyed being involved in what was going on in literature and politics. They're among the fortunate ones—the ones who've had it all. And this can be held against an artist in a period such as ours which celebrates the truncated biography of a Gorky or a Pollock. Heroes are supposed to be simple—and if they're complex, at least they ought to die young. Even Picasso is begrudged his paradoxes. In addition, both Masson and Hélion were great intellectuals, which no doubt discomforts art critics who like to imagine that they know more than the artist about something. I expect that Masson and Hélion would be more highly regarded today if they had accomplished considerably less.

Ultimately, the challenges posed by the achievements of Masson and Hélion, along with the post-World War II work of Picasso, are formal challenges. Each of these artists, in his different way, used paint to create illusions. While the theory of modernism, especially in America, encourages us to believe that in modern art literalness is all—paint as paint, canvas as canvas—Picasso and Masson and Hélion have insisted on the figurativeness of paint—paint as a symbol or metaphor, paint as a description of a person, a space, a world. Yet they've each also believed after their own fashion in the literalness of paint. Thus they're caught betwixt and between—neither exactly "modernist" nor exactly "anti-modernist." It's just this betwixt-and-betweenness that now interests a new generation—my generation. And to an American in Paris in February it seemed clear that a final judgment on the late Picasso or on Masson or Hélion can hardly be attempted until we know something more about who we are and where we're headed.

Despite the considerable fame they achieved, both Masson and Hélion always believed that their art was undervalued. They were right, and they were also right to look to succeeding generations for a broader appreciation of their work. Perhaps this is part of why they were inclined to give a warm welcome to the young. Many of us benefitted. God bless you, Jean Hélion and André Masson. The risks you took, the many new paths you explored, the inveterate outsider status you came to take for granted—all of this seems more relevant with each passing day.

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Dance

Easy watching

by Eva Resnikova

Lar Lubovitch's *Concerto Six Twenty-two,* to Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, has elicited impassioned responses, largely because of its extended male adagio. The dance critics of both the *Times* and the *Post* cited the ballet as among the best in dance in their year-end roundups for 1986. When it was presented last July at the Mostly Mozart Festival—the first time a dance company had ever performed there—the work was greeted with the kind of applause usually reserved in the music world for operatic superstars. Performed on its own at the Dancing for Life benefit last October, the pas de deux drew the greatest audience response and was the emotional high point of the evening. As the *New York Native* put it, "Suddenly, the evening's legions of ballerinas and galaxy of stars became irrelevant, as two men explored mutual trust and support in a dance relationship that evolved as we watched."

Lubovitch himself says in the *Native* that he was not out to make a political statement but wanted merely to comment on friendship, that he wanted "to say something about dignity, about the ways two men can relate." At the same time, he adds, "I don't think it's a mistake to respond to the political or emotional overtones of the dance. Whether or not I had intended it that way, everything that I am, that I believe in, that I do, goes into what I make." Attempting to explain himself in more mainstream publications, however, the choreographer tends to become mired in tautology and contradiction. From *Newsday*: "Dancing is my subject . . . . It's not about storytelling, it's not about moral platitudes, it's not about choreography, it's not about intellectual ponderances [*sic*]. It's about movement—passionate, full-bodied movement—and it's to music." From *The New York Times*: "My work is more about dancing than it is about choreography. By that I mean, the choreography is still the most important thing, but the subject is dancing."

The novelty of the pas de deux has by now dissipated, and audiences had the opportunity to re-examine Lubovitch's Mozart ballet in a more dispassionate light when it was presented in repertory during the company's two-week season at City Center in March. Lubovitch's description of the work in *New York Native,* given on the eve of the opening of the City Center season, seems apt: "The overall theme of the piece is friendship." The pas de deux treats friendship between two men, and the outer movements treat friendship within a group. But why, then, didn't he name it something like *Friendships*? When you stop to consider it, *Concerto Six Twenty-two* has got to be one of the most perverse titles in all of dance history. It was Balanchine who accustomed us to having ballets named after the titles the composers gave their scores, in an attempt to discourage viewers from seeing stories in his non-programmatic works and to signal that the only "subject matter" of the dance was its music. (Of course, Balanchine's so-called

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abstract ballets are filled with extramusical meanings.) But what are we to make of a dance whose choreographer has named it after the arbitrary catalogue number that was assigned the score by a musicologist seventy years after the composer's death?

If this seems a small matter to fuss over, it's emblematic of Lubovitch's pretensions and the shallowness of his musical response. He's not unmusical in the sense that he has no feel for music; rather, his choreography merely skims the music's surface. What you see is what you get; subsequent viewings reveal no hidden depths. It's easy-watching choreography, the visual equivalent of easy-listening music, and its superficiality makes it immediately accessible—ergo the oversize response to *Concerto Six Twenty-two* at the Mostly Mozart Festival from a largely subscription audience to one of the city's most aggressively middlebrow summer concert series.

The pas de deux is not without choreographic interest, however, and the plaintive quality of the clarinet makes Mozart's adagio a good choice of background music. Lubovitch explores the traditional vocabulary of the pas de deux—supporting and lifting, being supported and being lifted—but these familiar movements are radically transformed and expanded by the simple fact that both partners are of equal heft and strength. On the level of affect, the pas de deux is admittedly sentimental; but given the times we're living in, a little sentimentality is not such a grievous sin. What I could have done without, however, was the arcane gesture of picking something up from the ground—a butterfly? a soul?—and lofting it into the air. No doubt the choreographer knows what this means, and perhaps he has informed the dancers; but it remains inscrutable to the audience. Illegibility is not, as the choreographer seems to think, an indication of depth.

The rest of *Concerto Six Twenty-two* is in Lubovitch's standard music-visualization mode: running, hopping, and skipping; turned-in, flexed-footed barefoot ballet; dangerous-looking slides and rolls and lifts à la Paul Taylor; mock-clumsy stompings, mock-stealthy tiptoeings, runs with pumping arms, shoulder shruggings, and other attempts at gross humor—all performed with that insipid flower-child expression intended to communicate what joy the dancers are experiencing performing Lubovitch's self-proclaimed "passionate, full-bodied movement." I think this feel-good approach to movement design is what Lubovitch means when he says that he's more interested in dancing than in choreography.

But Lubovitch is not all fun and games. He has another mood, angst, which he logically reserves for Teutonic music. *Of My Soul,* to Bach's Cantata no. 78, contains literal as well as figurative breast-beating. It also incorporates sign language for the deaf to spell out the words being sung. Since it may be safely assumed that the vast majority of his audience cannot read sign language, the gimmick seems another instance of willful illegibility parading as profundity. *A Brahms Symphony* (the first three movements of the third) uses head-hanging to signal seriousness of intent, especially in the third movement, which is the last movement of the ballet, leaving those viewers who know and love the music hanging in midair. Lubovitch does not have the musicianship that allowed Balanchine to rearrange the movements of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings and come up with *Serenade.*

The most accomplished work presented during the Lubovitch company's City Center season was the premiere, *Musette,* set to Francis Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos. One of the reasons why this ballet comes close to fulfilling its modest ambitions is the choice of music: Poulenc's 1932 score does not pretend to be anything other than a charming divertissement, with two allegro outer movements and a central larghetto in which the composer pays tribute to his beloved Mozart.

The girls are dressed in fluffy petticoats in muted shades, with black neck ribbons for a Gallic, if anachronistic, touch. The dancing in the outer movements is light-

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hearted and energetic, beginning with a series of stage-crossing runs that nicely catch the silent-movie-chase mood of the music. In the third movement the dancers pass from partner to partner as in a square dance; later they form waltzing couples. The Mozartean larghetto is all delicately pointed toes and gracious révérences.

Musette—the title refers to *bal musette,* a popular-dance hall—is far from perfect. Lubovitch could not restrain himself, for example, from creating a goofy male solo in the third movement. But unlike his Koechel-number ballet and his sign-language ballet and his three-quarters-of-a-symphony ballet, *Musette* is refreshingly unpretentious. The title tells it all: it's about dancing, and it's to music.

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Books

Writing about Degas

by Dan Hofstadter

There is, in the Bibliotèque Nationale, a famous photo of Edgar Degas, taken a little before his death by Sacha Guitry or one of his cameramen. In this picture Degas is feeling his way with an umbrella along the Boulevard de Clichy, his eyes hidden by the shadow of his bowler brim. He has just passed his reflection in a piano store window, but he cannot—mercifully—have seen himself. We know that his spirits had declined with his eyesight; one friend remarked that if Degas had been able to make out his image as he looked in old age, he'd have broken the glass that held it. In the photo his beard is long and white, yet somehow it is impossible for us, who so enjoy his late work, to imagine him really enfeebled. We want to think of him as a man whose powers only increased with old age, a virile senescent giant from some Italian fresco.

This is ironic, for people who knew him in his thirties said that he behaved, even then, like a confirmed *vieux garçon.* Later, toward the end, Paul Valéry noted that Degas had assumed the mannerisms of a crusty old gentleman of the 1860s, as if that were what he had always really wanted to be. Valéry said that Degas despised humanity, and what was such misanthropy if not "a germ of senility, an *a priori* crotchetiness?" Another admirer, the young Daniel Halévy, remarked upon the painter's penchant for tacking "Eh, what?"'s onto the end of his phrases. Despite the novelty of his art, the elderly Degas relished being able to seem like a holdover from the period preceding his birth—a period whose sumptuary laws he tried, within reason, to uphold. It was as if his personal style had at last matured into seamless self-contradiction. He was peerless in his dowdy audacity.

The glamorous curmudgeon is long gone, but in a way his powers have survived him. Of all the artists of the last century, it is he—together with his idol, Ingres—who is most with us, most alive. And we have started to study his work more comprehensively than before. Over the past decade, about a dozen shows—some quite large—have been devoted to his art, and in February an enormous Degas exhibition opened at the Grand Palais in Paris.[1]

The scholars, meanwhile, relentlessly ply us with books and catalogues. Among other fresh offerings, there is a handsomely illustrated biography by Denys Sutton (who wrote the standard life of Degas's follower, Walter Sickert) and a revised version, in paper, of Professor Theodore Reff's well-known interpretive work, *Degas: The Artist's Mind.* We also now have Professor Eunice Lipton's *Looking Into Degas,* which delves into the sociology of the artist's pictorial world, and Richard Thomson's *The Private Degas,* which affords a brief look at the craft behind the art. All serve to remind us that there are

1 This exhibition, entitled "Degas," will be on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from October 11, 1988 through January 8, 1989.

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now more, not fewer, plausible readings of the master's achievement.[2]

Every good book on Degas owes something to Valéry's *Degas Danse Dessin,* which was first published by Gallimard in 1938.[3] This little volume is a literary hodgepodge, as confusing as a wicked Mallarmé sentence, and many of Valéry's abstract ruminations on drawing and dance are, to me at least, of exemplary obscurity. But the material on Degas himself, who unwittingly served as one of the models for Valéry's fictional character Monsieur Teste, has never been bettered. A lot of writing on Degas is cheapened by an excessive interest in subject matter, but Valéry was excited primarily by Degas's *style,* which he tried to explore with reference to the man's artistic personality—both his passive "sensibility" and his active "temperament." Valéry broods on just the things that painters often puzzle over in their studios. How should a painter (or indeed any artist) go about starting a piece? How should he—or can he—finish it? Can he revise it later, and if so, by what means? How much should an artist yield to unconscious processes, and to what degree can he articulate his aims without over-intellectualizing them? What is the part of intuition, and what is that of knowledge? The answers to these questions, and also their evasions, are woven into the very fabric of Degas's art, which becomes, in part, their metaphorical expression.

Valéry isn't much interested in the independent existence of the objects in Degas's work; he understands that they are alibis, vessels for the impress of his spirit. And what the poet perceives in Degas's spirit—in its way of pictorially stamping its shape upon paper and canvas—is, above all, its emphasis on sheer willpower. Valéry points out that the painter was never satisfied with the products of his spontaneity. "His mind was too critical, too steeped in the Masters, to yield to a natural sensuality," he writes. "There are beings who do not feel that they have acted—that they have accomplished anything—if they have not done so in opposition to themselves."

Degas's willfulness was heightened by an almost constant self-opposition, a flexing of contrary motives. His defiance was matched by his conventionalism, his stern self-revisions by his acceptance of the unfinished, and his appreciation of honest virtuosity by a fondness for dubious technical tricks. Everyone around him detected the paradoxicality of his nature. "He's always searching for accidents," said Daniel Halévy's father, Ludovic. Though proclaiming himself a purist in all sorts of matters, Degas was forever trying to combine art materials that didn't seem likely to get along. He was a manic hybridizer, a crossbreeder of mutual animosities.

Valéry is alive to the Italian in Degas, whose half-Italian father had grown up in Naples. He perhaps makes too much of the painter's fluency in the Neapolitan dialect, of his stridency in debate, of his way of casually breaking into Cimarosa songs; yet all this did have its part in Degas's artist-nature. He had lost his mother at thirteen, and perhaps because of that became a champion of hopeless causes. Naples had been a Bourbon principality until 1860, and thus had a sentimental, reactionary allure; so did Confederate New Orleans, where Degas had other kinsmen, and so, later, did the defeated anti-Dreyfusards. It was characteristic of Degas that when his banker father died insolvent, in 1874, he took it upon himself to acquit the outstanding debts. The Degas clan be-

2 *Degas: Life and Work,* by Denys Sutton, was published by Rizzoli in 1986 (344 pages, $85); *Degas: The Artist's Mind,* by Theodore Reff, was reissued last year by Harvard University Press (352 pages, $16.95 in paperback); *Looking Into Degas: Uneasy Images of Women and Modern Life,* by Eunice Lipton, was published in 1986 by the University of California Press (237 pages, $35); *The Private Degas,* by Richard Thomson, was published by Thames and Hudson last year (143 pages, $19.95).

3 An English translation of *Degas Danse Dessin* may be found in Paul Valéry's *Degas Manet Morisot,* translated by David Paul (Bollingen Series/Pantheon Books, 1960). The entire text is included in the book, which is Volume Twelve in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry,* edited by Jackson Mathews.

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lieved themselves scions of a Crusader lord, and were allied by marriage with the Morbilli, an Italian ducal line; the last thing the painter wished was to betray the family honor. As a result, he gave up his fortune, and moved into rooms off a dingy little street, where he dined on boiled macaroni and Dundee marmalade. Yet surely his relative poverty was half-welcome. It gave him an excuse for staying single—he'd always been wary of women—and for raking up the past.

Degas's disciplined observance of a covenant of debt, his refusal to declare bankruptcy, fits in with Valéry's conception of his "voluntarist" temperament. Valéry might have added that Degas's emotional relationship to his paintings was also somewhat promissory or contractual. He would give his word to himself, as it were, that he was going to pull off some feat to perfection, and then feel duty-bound to succeed. He couldn't let go. The result was eternal revision—the endless bringing of canvases up to an imaginary mark—and more than a few badly overworked pieces. He would give or sell or trade something to someone, then steal it back, "correct" it, and so destroy it. One collector friend was rumored to have padlocked a Degas to the wall.

But if Degas was married to the past, he also kept the future as his mistress. It is useful, in his case, to remember that there are two sorts of faith. We talk of "keeping" faith (as with a promise) and of "having" faith (as in a personal providence); Degas was no stranger to either. He believed in codes and canons, but also in the form of unfolding destiny that is style. The latter belief expressed itself most obviously in his "spin-offs." In these myriad reworkings the motif would remain the same, but the medium, handling, or cropping would be changed. He'd make a drawing, reverse it, try it out in oils, work it up into an etching, color a proof, "flop" it again, trace it five times, develop one tracing into a big pastel—the process never stopped. Every image was pregnant with possibilities, a bearer of infinite hope.

The same equipoise between backward-looking indebtedness and forward-looking venturesomeness may be found in Degas's drawing. Here the debt was to Ingres, whose doctrines he had learned in his youth, and who had told him, in a celebrated encounter, to "draw a lot of lines." Valéry reminds us that Ingres wanted to turn his own lines into super-fluid "conductors" of the viewer's glance; for this he was willing to "push grace to monstrosity," as in *Mlle. Revière* or *Roger and Angelica*. From Ingres and his pupils Degas inherited a love of arabesques, along with certain old-fashioned practices, such as drawing preliminary nude studies of figures that were to be draped. Here it should be noted that three different ways of drawing the model co-existed in the nineteenth century (and still do). You could go for the proportions, which is apparently what David taught Ingres and his other pupils to do; you could go for the design at the probable expense of the proportions, which is how Ingres arrived at his "monstrous" arabesques; and, lastly, you could go for the pose—or the arrested action—which is what Degas did. He drew not so much people as poses, which is why he had to find situations, like the ballet and the bath, in which the pose, not the person, was paramount. But at the same time he tried to hang on to the accurate proportions and the strong abstract design of great classic art. The Irish writer George Moore, who like Valéry was friendly with Degas, perceptively wrote that Degas's method was at bottom the same as Ingres's, "but the subject-matter is so different that the method is in all outward characteristics transformed."

Degas puts Ingres's form-language through a set of realistic paces; a Degas drawing is Ingres in the streets, the theater wings, the bathrooms. For many people of the Second Empire the notion of "the truth" came to be associated with chance or randomness—the kaleidoscope of walkers in the boulevard—and Degas was no exception. But even as he blitzed his cast of characters with new-fangled lighting effects, he tried to hang on to Ingres's concept of drawing. And as he

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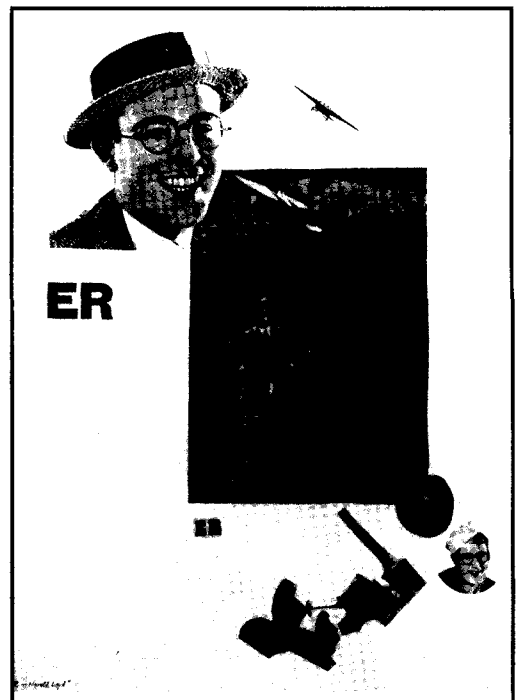
pulled farther and farther away from Ingres he praised him all the more frequently, just as Ingres, in departing from Raphael, had invoked the master of Urbino. Yet Degas never lost his love for the classic problems, and delighted in painting horses and cavaliers and ladies nude or scantily clad. The racecourse, the jockey, the ballet, the tub—these were largely excuses to regain the grand old subjects. The point is obvious but important: it protects us from the philistinism of taking Degas's motifs literally—of turning his art, as many writers still do, into a form of painted journalism.

The biggest philistines in this regard are those art critics and historians who, consciously or unconsciously, want to assimilate the aesthetic to the moral sense. They cannot accept that art is largely play; they want it to be a form of Puritan good works. Fortunately, Professor Eunice Lipton, of SUNY Binghamton, is not liable to charges quite so gross. Her *Looking Into Degas,* a feminist reading of the master's pictorial treatment of women, shows warm admiration of Degas's strictly aesthetic virtues, and concisely marshals much reliable evidence concerning the true nature of his models. She claims that in his paintings traditional Parisian subjects of titillation, like ballerinas and pretty laundresses, are returned to their real status as ordinary working people. This is probably true; it's certainly what George Moore sensed in the pictures. He spoke of "the dim, sad poetry of female work," and of sumptuous bonnets that meant for the little milliner merely "long hours of weariness and dejection." Degas confirmed this view: "These women of mine are honest, simple folk," he told Moore. Where Lipton goes awry, though, is in seeing Degas's paintings as some sort of "ideological masquerade," a feint whereby the real face of society is subtly despoiled of its bourgeois disguises. She shares with many non-feminist intellectuals a tendency to dwell upon the reportorial value of imaginative works of art. Though artworks may actually have such merits, they ought to be of minor importance to people of developed



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visual sensibility. In Degas they are particularly questionable; one noted historian of nineteenth-century French art, Ronald Pickvance, has concluded that Degas took such liberties with what he saw around him that his pictures lack all documentary credibility. And indeed the artist sniffed at journalistic verism; Zola, he said, was "a giant studying a telephone book."

Valéry, who never made the mistake of taking any work of art literally, was a great admirer of the slender sheaf of sonnets that Degas composed in old age. I doubt that it even occurred to him to think that Degas's line, "All nervously nude in its robe of silk," referred exclusively to a racehorse: he surely remembered that the artist too had a bloodline. For the poetic imagination, every work of art is primarily an account, not of the world, but of the artist's feelings about the world at a certain moment. Degas himself was the thoroughbred; "I run the long race, but I am content with my bag of oats," he liked to say. He also liked, as the Goncourts mention in their journal, to mimic the movements of the Opéra ballet girls, and when he summed up his bathers for George Moore as "the human animal grooming itself—a cat licking itself," we recognize once more that the nervous nudity of these creatures is that of the artist himself. Degas invests his bathing women with so much idiosyncratic visual energy that they become, in a way, his self-portrait. That is why the interminable discussions of his attitude to them and their station in life are, from the strictly artistic point of view, almost completely irrelevant.

If there is a way that gender is relevant to Degas, it probably has to do with the balance of masculine and feminine impulses within the artist himself. These impulses disclose themselves more clearly in his *way* of painting than in *what* he paints. A friend of mine, a woman artist, said to me recently that for her Degas was largely about "control versus losing control"—about conventionally "male" domination versus "female" abandon. A look at his pictures bears this out. On the one hand, there is a commitment to advance work, to detailed preliminary studies; on the other, a risky search for such accidents as might result from the application of daring glazes, tones impulsively rubbed together, edges hacked up with a "grainer," and so on. The young Degas starts out as a tonal painter who wants, like Ingres, to work everything out in monochrome first. He makes some sort of underpainting, a grisaille or imprimatura, then matches his colors to this map ("a touch here, a touch there," as he expressed it). He follows Ingres's dictum that everything that is well drawn can be well enough painted. In a lot of his work, right through the mid-Eighties, you feel you could peel away a skin of color that isn't quite essential to the painting. The work has very good color, but it isn't *made* of color. In a painting class of today, this would very likely be regarded as a fault, because it embodies a pre-modern way of thinking: it reflects the early nineteenth-century French concept of values as the steps on a chiaroscuro scale. Later in the century, after Corot and Pissarro and Monet, this concept changes and starts to refer to the total visual weight of any stroke, area, or sequence of identical spots (as in textile or wallpaper repeats). The term "value" comes to indicate not only the degree of lightness but also the hue, saturation, paint quality, and even size of a color patch, and composition evolves into the science of adjusting the weights of "pieces of paint"—as one might weigh up the ingredients for a soup on a kitchen scale.

In Degas, too, you can see this shift from chiaroscuro values to color values; it feels once again like a transition from "keeping" faith with what one *has* done (in an initial monochrome design) to "having" faith in what providence *will* do (if one trusts in the power of color). Mastery and probity are traded in for intuition and surprise. I don't know if it makes sense to talk about paintings as if they had hormones, but if so, Degas's work acquires more female hormones at some point—it's full of expectancy and nurturing and play. By degrees he grows able to think of color as the constituent ele-

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ment of a piece, and he lets it largely determine how the piece will look. In his pastels from the Eighties on, and in paintings like *La Coiffure* or *Four Dancers,* he does for color what Ingres had done for line; he lets it shape structure by itself, without compulsively relating it back to a decoding of nature.

All of Degas's paintings are valuable, but if some do not really come off, it's usually for one of two reasons—either everything's simply too fragmentary, or the color-values don't work. In certain earlier paintings, he miscalculates how much of a given color an area of tone can take, like a wall, and the wall starts to shout and drown out everything else. Sometimes he senses that this is about to happen, and he holds his hand, leaving the area—and the painting—unfinished, and it's beautiful. Later, when he catches on to the limitations of the two-step system (first a monochrome, then full color) and goes over into thinking in color weights, he can't always balance them adroitly. He sometimes slips into a weird, self-defeating system of using orange to color, green to neutralize, and violet to shadow. This is to wish that colors behaved like values—which they don't. In a black-and-white study, three girls with black hair look fine, but in full color three girls with orange hair just seem preposterous and cloying—especially when they all have the same purple shadows. In the history of the painter's craft, Degas is a "hinge" figure whose greatest works have some of the static design-strength of the old tonal painting plus some of the dynamic color-building of the new. In pictures like the Chicago Art Institute's *The Morning Bath,* or the Brooklyn Museum's *Femme au Tub,* he points toward Bonnard and Vuillard and Fairfield Porter.

Denys Sutton's *Degas: Life and Work* doesn't contain much painting criticism, but it's enlightening because it tries to set the record straight about Degas's artistic development. Many friendships and influences are chronicled and explained. Unlike many déclassé patricians, Degas didn't sink into

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secretive money-grubbing, but he was no saint of noble indifference, either. As Sutton unsparingly shows, he was really rather cruel; talent replaced class as an advantage to be pressed ruthlessly home. The revised Reff book, *Degas: The Artist's Mind,* may disappoint some readers. It deals almost exclusively with iconographical matters that were probably intriguing when it first came out, in 1968, but have since lost much of their interest through over-interpretation (no fault of Reff's). When Reff writes, apropos of *Interior* (the great canvas that preceded the rest of the late Henry P. McIlhenny's collection into the Philadelphia Museum), that "The demand for 'something white' . . . resulted in the addition of a ball of white thread whose presence we might otherwise have sought to explain in iconographic terms," does he really mean to suggest that an iconographic interpretation of this or any artwork can be self-sufficient and separable from a painterly reading? One doubts it; one wishes he had pursued some of his other interests further. He quotes an intriguing remark by Quentin Bell concerning *Interior* and several other Degas images of ostensibly sexual goings-on: "In all these pictures the left is, so to speak, the female side to the canvas—it is separated from the right by a central element, across which Degas sets a unifying diagonal . . . [and] the element of hostility between the sexes is apparent." Reff supports Bell's view that this device is an "expression of psychological alienation," then drops the issue to pass on to a relatively minor iconographic problem. But we readers want to know who is "alienated" from whom, or what? If you carefully study the enigmatic *Interior*—the dim room with its sprigged wallpaper, the mean single bed, the kneeling woman in her shift, the fully dressed man with his back against the door —you may well come to the conclusion that since the separation of the sexes here and elsewhere in Degas entails a *structural* rift between left and right, it is not principally about man's alienation from woman but about a split inside the artist himself. These pictures seem to be a reportage from within.

Again and again Degas's compositions show this polarization between left and right; again and again they elegantly resolve it. Often it's as if one side of the picture limped, or would limp if it hadn't developed some system of adaptive compensation. This left-right tension, like the male-female tension in Degas's execution, is one of the main things that his paintings are about; it shows how the medium of paint-on-canvas could be used to express the duality of one artist's spirit. Yet Degas was not utterly eccentric, for we all feel a similar tug within ourselves. It should be mentioned, too, that as a pictorial dynamic it is by no means unique to his work. There's no better example of Degas's importance for Vuillard than the latter's *Conjugal Life* of 1900, in which we again behold the dark room with its busy wallpaper, and the sad woman on the left, and the man on the right with his back against the door.

Valéry mentions that when a certain critic accused Degas of "a constant insecurity in the proportions," the painter heartily agreed. Constant insecurity is what necessarily comes about if you compose with arabesques and color weights; it shows that you're sensitive to the needs of your painting. The problem with a lot of academic writing about Degas is that it inventories and evaluates objects rather than color weights, yet even in his free copies of earlier masters Degas can be seen thinking primarily in terms of color, not of the seams between objects.

Richard Thomson reproduces two of these free copies in his fascinating book, *The Private Degas.* Thomson cares about Degas as a craftsman, and rightly believes that his way of working, the record of his temperament in action, shows more about him than any amount of anecdotal interpretation. One of the copies is of Mantegna's *The Crucifixion,* which is appropriate, because Degas shared with the quattrocento painters a speculative interest in the artist's métier. But whereas the Italians wished to use painting to find out about the world, to grasp how it presents itself to our eyes, Degas tried to apply

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the modern inventor's empirical cast of mind to the *practice* of painting. With his contempt for spontaneity he pre-planned as much as he could, but once engaged in a piece, he'd slowly start burning his boats. He believed as completely in the "secrets" of the Old Masters as an alchemist in the Philosophers' Stone, yet in moments of frank self-scrutiny would confess that he had not found his method—"that would only bore me."

Degas's true method was a kind of no-method, infinitely protean and expansible. Thomson elucidates at least three different techniques of hybridization—changing the medium, sometimes in mid-course; corrective or inventive tracing; and counterproofing, or the trick of turning over a drawing and rubbing it onto a fresh page. Any composition had nine lives; pastels grew through accretion, "like a coral reef." Reading Thomson, you realize after awhile that Degas was a sort of neoclassicist of the self who regarded his own works as the classics to be copied and restored—Vitruvius and Bramante in one person. He often said that art was simply repetition, and this, perhaps, is why he so loved the rehearsals—the *répétitions*—of the ballet girls. "It is essential to redo the same subject ten times, one hundred times," he maintained. Art, for him, had the compulsion of a vice; many artists did and still do regard such practices as essentially vicious, morbidly addictive in their power to sap creative freedom and confuse intentions. And it is true that Degas's way of composing could create the effect of what Thomson calls "abrupt spatial disengagement," as when he juxtaposed unrelated drawings and photos. Thomson points out that Degas "pillaged journalistic illustration" for figures and props and bits of stage business; yet that didn't make him a journalist. It simply helped him to achieve the feel of the random and the adventitious. Of course he was "faking it," as the illustrators say, but his fakery faithfully mirrored his obsession with Chance.

Valéry observed that Degas tried to "combine the instantaneous with infinite labor in the studio; to pin down the impression in the developed study; to hold the immediate in the time-lapse of willed reflection." It was all mere sleight of hand, of course—an illusionism of spontaneity and firsthand experience—yet something in Degas's style gives the game away. It is the half-finished quality which so often grants us a peep at the techniques of visual bluffing, and which calls to mind the holes in the fibs of the confirmed liar. For Degas, art was "a bag of shameless tricks to keep us looking honest," as he once confided to Sickert. "We give the idea of truth with falsehood." This unresolved tension between truth and falsehood is the grandest and most troubling of all Degas's inner contradictions. When we read of how he turned to a fellow painter at the Cirque Fernando and said, "I thrive on shams," or of how he told Ludovic Halévy one evening at a café that his little son Daniel was "vicious" and would thus "go far," we can practically hear the nasty old man who loved to hang out in brothels and shock his dear friends with incredibly rude remarks. The Goncourts wrote that he was "the high priest of the religion of misstatement," and though their meaning wasn't quite clear, they surely had a point. In a sense, Degas was duplicitous, and like any great liar he loved to unmask another; he early perceived the small mendacities of the photographers. "Faux peintre, faux artiste," he taunted Nadar. "Va donc, eh! Faux . . . tographe!"

One of the many unusual inserts in Valéry's jumble of a book is a sort of diary by Berthe Morisot, in the course of which she mentions a dinner for Mallarmé where Degas said straight out: "Art is falsehood." It was only because Degas saw so honestly, though, that he could perceive the deceptions of his craft. Often summed up as one who pitilessly mocked his modern subjects with his cool and classicizing style, he actually reserved his sharpest sarcasm for his own devious procedures. Fairfield Porter wrote of Degas that he could not forgive life for not being art, yet we sense that he did love life, if only in the wistful, hooded way of those who feel that they have mere

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observer-status here on earth. It might be more accurate to say that he forgave art for not being life; even that—with a cynical fond shake of the head—he let it be a bit of a cheat.

The novelist in letters

R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis, editors
The Letters of Edith Wharton.
Scribner's, 576 pages, $21.95

reviewed by Louis Auchincloss

No fewer than eight thousand letters of Edith Wharton survive in libraries and private collections. Correspondence was the lubricant of the many whirring wheels of her long and active life. If her art was her first love, it was still only one of many. She ran two large houses, one near Paris, the other on the Riviera, with well-trained staffs and elaborate gardens; she travelled incessantly, the most indefatigable and discriminating of tourists; she entertained with charm and skill (Henry James spoke of her "succulent and corrupting meals"); she raised large sums for charity, particularly in World War I; and she kept a sharp eye on her publishers and her investments. In her "leisure" hours she read exhaustively, treasured her friendships, and loved her dogs. Percy Lubbock quoted ingenuous critics as saying that her books had to be written "on the bare margin of such a populous and ornamental existence."

Every day there were people to write: editors, agents, lawyers, men of business, American cousins at home, and then, more importantly for posterity, the cherished friends: Sara Norton, Daisy Chanler, Moreton Fullerton, Gaillard Lapsley, John Hugh-Smith, Bernard Berenson. The Lewises, excellent editors of this rich volume, found that half of the surviving correspondence was of little interest to the general reader. Of the remaining four thousand letters they have used four hundred. These epistles are vivid, deeply intelligent, and highly readable. Above all, they constitute an indispensable annex to R. W. B. Lewis's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography. In some instances they seem almost to caricature the woman he delineated. She is more passionate, more self-willed, even more prejudiced. But she is always intensely alive.

The great loss is her letters to Henry James, of which the master burnt perhaps as many as a hundred and seventy in the bonfire of his private papers. If one of the very few that he preserved, describing a visit to the front in 1915, is a fair example, we are missing the best of her correspondence, for she would have pondered the words in writing to her *cher maître*. What comes out very clearly, however, in the other letters is the fact that, however much she loved and revered the man, and admired the great novels of his middle period, she had even less stomach for his late style than she indicated in her memoirs. In 1903 she wrote to her editor at Scribner's:

> I return the reviews with many thanks. I have never before been discouraged by criticism, because when the critics have found fault with me I have usually abounded in their sense, & seen, as I thought, a way of doing better the next time; but the continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I can't read, much as I delight in the man), & the assumption that the people I write about are not "real" because they are not navvies & char-women, makes me feel rather hopeless. I write about what I see, what I happen to be nearest to, which is surely better than doing cowboys . . . .

And the year before she had written to the same editor: "Don't ask me what I think of *The Wings of the Dove*."

Of course, I recognize that many readers have felt this way about the late novels, but it still seems surprising that a person as discriminating as Wharton, who thought James worthy of the Nobel Prize and tried to help him get it, should have bogged down so completely before what many critics (including this one) regard as his finest fiction and

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the culmination of his life work. But then Wharton had little use for Joyce or Eliot, either, and deplored the Proust of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*. What her letters do contribute, however, to the understanding of James, the man, is this appalling and pathetic picture of the master in the grip of a near suicidal depression in 1910 after the poor reception of the Scribner's deluxe edition of his collected work. Visiting him in London she had this to record:

> I could hardly believe it was the same James who cried out to me his fear, his despair, his craving for the "cessation of consciousness," & all his unspeakable loneliness & need of comfort, & inability to be comforted! "Not to wake—not to wake—" that was his refrain; "& then one *does* wake, & one looks again into the blackness of life, & everything ministers to it—all one reads & sees & hears." And London is a torture—& the thought of the return to Rye intolerable; his hotel uninhabitable; any other hotel not to be considered; life without a nurse too difficult; the nurse at Rye insufferable; another strange nurse impossible; solitude suicidal; & companionship excruciating. Don't think I am exaggerating: it was all this & more—with cries, with tears, & a sudden éffondrement at the end, when, after pleading with me to stay—"Don't go, my child, don't go—think of my awful loneliness!"

If we are missing the letters to James we are partially compensated with those to Morton Fullerton, who, as all readers of Lewis's biography know, was Wharton's lover in 1908 and 1909. It is pretty certain that he was her only one. She was forty-six, and her marriage to the boring and neurotic "Teddy" Wharton was foundering. She found in Fullerton, a clever journalist slightly younger then herself, the hero whom she had been waiting for all her life but who she had never dreamed would really come. He seems to have been a rather second-rate sort of man, with a history of shabby love affairs with both sexes, but it must be recorded that he was much liked by two such discriminating gentlemen of the world as Henry James and Walter Berry. At any rate he could not long remain (and perhaps had no desire to) atop the pedestal on which the adoring novelist sought to place him. But for as long as he did, she imagined that she had at last discovered the life in which art and love had achieved their perfect blend. She wrote to him:

> I shouldn't say this if you hadn't shown me that you understood. I don't want to have any plan of conduct with you—to behave in this way or that way—but just to be natural, to be completely myself. And the completest expression of that self is in the desire to help you, to give you the chance to develop what is in you, & to live the best life you can. Nothing else counts for me now, Dear, except the wish to do some good work, & to have you see in it the reflection of all the beauty you have shown me.

She shared the illusion of countless lovers that a perfect naturalism could and should reign between them:

> Pascal's terrible "il faut de l'adresse pour aimer" ["it takes skill to love"] has a noble side if it means the exercise of tact, insight, sympathy, self-effacement; but it is the most sordid of counsels if it appeals to the instinct to dole out, dissemble, keep in suspense, in order to prolong a little a feeling that hasn't enough vitality to survive without such aids.—There would have been the making of an accomplished flirt in me, because my lucidity shows me each move of the game—but that, in the same instant, a reaction of contempt makes me sweep all the counters off the board & cry out:—"Take them all—I don't want to win—I want to lose everything to you!"—But I pause, remembering you once told me that, on this topic, I serve up the stalest of platitudes with an air of triumphant discovery!—

If Fullerton really criticized her quite so bluntly, he was certainly taking her injunction to be natural very literally. But perhaps he was already beginning to be bored. I am aware that there are critics who have welcomed these letters as evidence that Wharton was now "fulfilled" as a woman and who

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profess to find that from here on a new depth of human sympathy appears in her fiction, but it simply distresses me to see a superior person moaning in the emotional grip of a more spotted soul, and I point out that her greatest novel, *The House of Mirth*, was written before she knew Fullerton, and that the artificial and "Racinian" (James's adjective for it) *The Reef* was written immediately after the affair and contains a love scene obviously based on it. But academia will never lose its oddly romantic faith that a necessary connection exists between an artist's work and an artist's love life.

Wharton wrote to Fullerton, in the happy days of their affair, that, when the end came, he was simply to put her letters in a bundle and send them back, and that she would understand. But when that time came, it was not so easy. "What has brought about such a change?" she almost wailed. "Oh, no matter what it is—*only tell me*! * * * My reason rejects the idea that a man like you, who has felt a warm sympathy for a woman like me, can suddenly, from one day to another, without any act or word on her part, lose even a friendly regard for her, and discard the mere outward signs of consideration by which friendship speaks."

She did, however—for her willpower was always formidable—make the effort to convert her love into friendship, and by May of 1909 she was able to write him: "The tiresome woman is *buried,* once for all, I promise, and only the novelist survives. *Viens déjeuner avec elle sans crainte demain.*"

Not quite, however. There were dying gasps:

> I have had a difficult year—but the pain within my pain, the last turn of the screw, has been the impossibility of knowing what you wanted of me, & what you felt for me—at a time when it seemed natural that, if you had any sincere feeling for me, you should see my need of an equable friendship—I don't say love because that is not made to order!—but the kind of tried tenderness that old friends seek in each other in difficult moments of life. My life was better before I knew you. That is, for me, the sad conclusion of this sad year. And it is a bitter thing to say to the one being one has ever loved d'amour.

By 1912 she had left her emotional involvement sufficiently in the past to be able to give Fullerton frank pointers on his literary style. Criticizing one of his articles, she tells him roundly that he has hung his whole argument with the heavy drape of the London *Times* jargon, "the most prolix and pedantic of all the dead languages." Perhaps she was unconsciously paying him back for his old crack about her stale platitudes. But what I suspect she was really doing was asserting at last her own indisputable superiority as a writer, as Tennessee Williams's aging actress in *Sweet Bird of Youth* hurls her genius in the face of the punk who has spent the night with her.

Nothing is more striking in the letters than Wharton's anti-Americanism. She finds her fellow countrymen Babbitts (Sinclair Lewis was later to dedicate his eponymous novel to her) and bores, and makes exception for her friends only because they, like herself, are not really Americans but "wretched exotics produced in a European glass-house, the most *deplaće* and useless class on earth!" Here is her opinion, in 1904, of a summer hotel in Petersham, Massachusetts:

> I despair of the Republic! Such dreariness, such whining sallow women, such utter absence of the amenities, such crass food, crass manners, crass landscape!! And mind you, it is a new and fashionable hotel. What a horror it is for a whole nation to be developing without the sense of beauty, and eating bananas for breakfast.

Two decades later, when Daisy (Mrs. Winthrop) Chanler protested that Edith was going too far, and that Ethel Derby (Theodore Roosevelt's daughter) was not only innately American but a great woman as well, Wharton replies:

> You mustn't lecture me for not appreciating America on the score that I don't know Ethel

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> Derby, for I've known her for years and years and like her very much. * * * Of course there are green isles in that sea of misery.

The correspondence sheds some light on Wharton as an artist. Most revealing on the question of literary technique is a letter of 1907 to Robert Grant, the Boston lawyer and novelist whose work she much admired:

> I conceive my subjects like a man—that is, rather more architectonically & dramatically than most women—& then execute them like a woman; or rather, I sacrifice, to my desire for construction & breadth, the small incidental effects that women have always excelled in, the episodical characterisation, I mean. The worst of it is that this fault is congenital, & not the result of an ambition to do big things. As soon as I look at a subject from the novel-angle I see it in its relation to a larger whole, in all its remotest connotations; & I can't help trying to take them in, at the cost of the smaller realism that I arrive at, I think, better in my short stories. This is the reason why I have always obscurely felt that I didn't know how to write a novel. I feel it more clearly after each attempt, because it is in such sharp contrast to the sense of authority with which I take hold of a short story.—I think it ought to be a warning to stop; but, alas, I see things more & more from the novel-angle, so that I'm enclosed in a vicious circle from which I suspect silence to be the only escape.

And she has this to say, in relation to *The House of Mirth*, as to why New York society is more corrupting than its counterparts in London or Paris:

> The little corner of its garment that I lifted was meant to show only that little atrophied organ—the group of idle & dull people—that exists in any big & wealthy social body. If it seems more conspicuous in New York than in an old civilization, it is because the whole social organization with us is so much smaller & less elaborate—& if, as I believe, it is more harmful in its influence, it is because fewer responsibilities attach to money with us than in other societies.—

Social conditions in the new world, she maintained, "where the sudden possession of money has come without inherited obligations or any traditional sense of solidarity between the classes" can be a vast and absorbing field for the novelist and calls for a master.

It is sad that she did not heed James's warning and "tether herself in native pastures." More and more out of touch with an America she despised but insisted on writing about, her satire in her later years became shrill and cantankerous. It is a bit pathetic that when she was writing to Daisy Chanler, responding to critics who accused her of having lost touch with the vernacular, she should have defended herself by claiming that her male American characters talked like "Pick and Larry White." These were two of Mrs. Chanler's sons-in-law. Lawrence Grant White, brilliant architect and son of Stanford, did indeed speak precise and perfect English. But he was hardly a typical Yank!

Losing the lost generation

Humphrey Carpenter Geniuses Together: American Writers in Paris in the 1920s. Houghton Mifflin, 246 pages, $18.95

reviewed by Bradley W. Bloch

It is difficult to think of a more self-conscious movement in the history of American letters than that which occurred on the Left Bank of Paris during the 1920s. Gathered in Montparnasse, the fabled Lost Generation spent a decade writing novels and poems about themselves, and the decades thereafter writing their account of those years. Predictably, an avalanche of memoirs, recorded by everyone from Hemingway to his bartender, has provided ample grist for the academic mill, which has responded with collections of letters, biographies, and studies revealing the true identities of fictional characters.

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The most recent addition to this catalogue is Humphrey Carpenter's *Geniuses Together: American Writers in Paris in the 1920s.* Carpenter, an Englishman who has written biographies of W. H. Auden, J. R. R. Tolkien, and C. S. Lewis, approaches his current subject with a wider scope than many of those who have gone before, seeking to trace the development of the entire expatriate literary phenomenon. His prologue begins not with Gertrude Stein but with Benjamin Franklin, chronicling the early relations between the United States and Paris, and then moving to the nineteenth century, when American artists began their pilgrimage to the Right Bank, even as the bohemian life across the river was being celebrated in books and plays. Carpenter finishes setting the table for "the longest-ever literary party" with a chapter each devoted to Stein, Natalie Barney, and Sylvia Beach, who among other things served as points of connection for the wave of expatriates which arrived after the war.

Anyone even moderately familiar with the period now knows enough to sketch out the rest of the book: Beach coming to her naïve rescue of *Ulysses,* Hemingway living in his cold-water flat, Robert McAlmon, editor of Contact Editions, staggering from bar to bar and author to author. These are all stories which have been told before and better; indeed, there is barely enough new information in *Geniuses Together* to make an article, let alone a book. In his foreword, Carpenter refers to the fact that the book's title is "shamelessly stolen from Robert McAlmon's memoirs of Paris in the 1920s, *Being Geniuses Together.*" One might be willing to forgive him this petty theft if the title was all he borrowed, but that is not the case. For the chapter covering the waning years of the decade, for example, Carpenter's endnotes read in full: "The source is Kay Boyle's narrative in *BGT.*" Other chapters are similarly annotated, and in the end one can only be appalled at what largely amounts to a rewriting of well-known anecdotes.

To be fair, Carpenter's version is appealing. He does not direct his energies to foreshadowing the fame of his subjects—after all, there is no suspense here—but rather to highlighting their foibles and shortcomings in a way that leaves one with renewed appreciation of the work that was accomplished. This is particularly the case with Hemingway; Carpenter vividly demonstrates that Hemingway's terse prose was achieved only after a long struggle with the puerile and the romantic. When he turns to Gertrude Stein, Carpenter illustrates the underlying similarities between her writing and that of Henry James, even as he remains sensitive to her influence on Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, and others.

Nevertheless, while Carpenter's intention is to make this period more accessible to those not intimately familiar with it, his book will undoubtedly have the opposite effect. As clarifying as a good literary biography can be, understanding of an era emerges from familiarity with primary sources. But what Carpenter has written is not even secondary literature. It is what one might call tertiary literature, taking the reader further away not only from the novels, plays, and poems which make the period worth studying in the first place, but also from the memoirs and biographies which followed. One wonders what is gained by reading Carpenter's condensation of Kay Boyle's memoirs—which are themselves once removed from the works of that era—instead of the original, even if Carpenter's version is less tedious. Wouldn't it be better simply to read *A Moveable Feast* than the tidbits from it which Carpenter tosses out, as if we haven't heard before that Fitzgerald worried to Hemingway about his sexual adequacy?

Given the lack of new material, what is the motivation behind *Geniuses Together*? When a book is published on a topic which has already been thoroughly excavated, one expects the author to write a foreword justifying his new effort in light of what has already been accomplished. Carpenter doesn't bother with this task, but he does reveal the thinking which underscores the book:

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> It is hard to read about life in 'the Quarter', as they all called Montparnasse, without wishing to have tasted it oneself—to have bumped into Ernest Hemingway in a bar, to have drunk away the night with Robert McAlmon, to have been caught up in the intrigues of the expatriates and participated in their long *fiesta*. It was far from being the most productive 'movement' in literary history; but to live in Paris is always a delight, and to live there when life seems full of possibilities and tomorrow you might turn out to be a genius—well, to quote another song, 'Who could ask for anything more?'

Geniuses Together abounds with this sort of unbridled enthusiasm, in which literary history is placed at the service of wish fulfillment.

Such exuberance prevents Carpenter from differentiating the memorable from the trivial. When the size of the bill one could run up at the Dôme becomes the basis for critical attention, the result can only be the flattening of the literary landscape. At the end of his book, Carpenter provides an appendix entitled "Biographies in Brief." He warns that "it makes no pretense of providing comprehensive information," but it clearly reveals the value system with which he analyzes the expatriate literary movement. Two of his entries read, in full:

> Martin, Florence (Flossie), former New York chorus girl; self-elected 'Queen' of the Dôme.
>
> Perkins, Maxwell (1884-1947), editor at Scribner's publishing house in New York.

This outlook is manifest in Carpenter's choice of material. He devotes twenty-four pages—nearly the longest chapter of the book—to following the expatriates from bar to bar during a Bastille Day celebration. On the other hand, the tumultuous and checkered life of Sherwood Anderson, whose *Winesberg, Ohio* had, as Carpenter admits, a significant effect on the writing of his generation, is dispensed with in less than a page.

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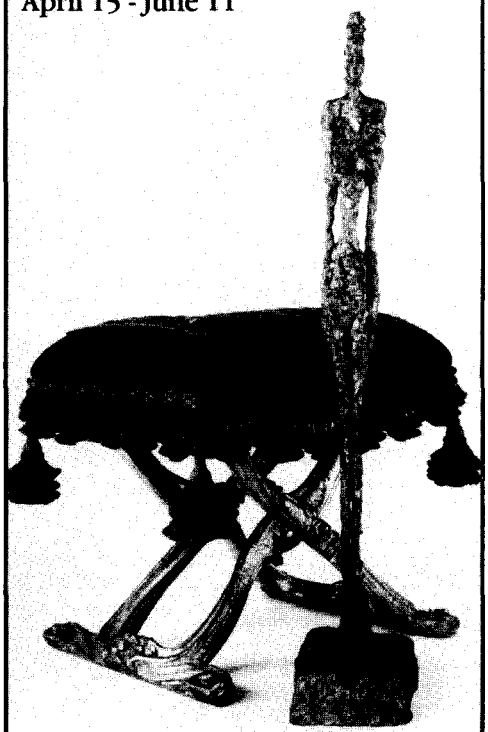

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Although scholars will dismiss *Geniuses Together,* the book is important for what it reveals about the way society regards and defines the artist and his work. Carpenter articulates a vision of the artistic life which is deeply ingrained in the popular imagination: if a would-be writer cavorts wildly enough, he will uncover so much "material" that the writing will take care of itself. It is the special characteristic of the Lost Generation that it provided the historical basis for this view, which is itself an evolution from earlier ideas.

The modern conception of an artist's life—as being fundamentally different from that of other men—has its roots in nineteenth-century England. Even as writing and painting became established professions supported by commercial markets, artists asserted their special role as the mediators of Truth and Beauty to mankind. Wordsworth's poem to the painter Haydon, written in 1815, reflects this sentiment:

> High is our calling, Friend!—Creative Art . . .
> Demands the service of a mind and heart
> Though sensitive, yet in their weakest part
> Heroically fashioned—to infuse
> Faith in the whispers of the lonely Muse
> While the whole world seems adverse to desert.

In 1845, the French periodical *Corsaire* published the first of a series of stories by a writer named Henri Murger based upon his life among the *demimonde* of impoverished painters, students, writers, and poets who inhabited the Latin Quarter. Eventually collected as a book, *Scènes de la Bohème,* which later served as the basis for Puccini's *La Bohème,* Murger's sketches altered perceptions of the artistic life. Although Murger's artists live in garrets where they burn their wood furniture to keep warm, they are neither miserable nor otherworldly; living by their wits, they are able to skip out on rent, cadge meals, and seduce women. They are passionately committed to their work—the poet Rodolphe stays up all night rearranging lines of verse—but they are always ready to retire to a café for the evening.

The romanticization of the artistic life begun by Murger reached its zenith in the memoirs and biographies of the Lost Generation. Carpenter's effort is simply the crystallization of this image. The artistic existence is not a lifetime of inspired creation, but a collection of accoutrements: dancing with bar girls, going to salons, taking boat trips. Carpenter draws heavily upon the memoirs of John Glassco, then a young Montparnasse hanger-on. Glassco's account of his life at that time echoes Murger's comic romantization:

> It was here that I tried seriously to write for the first time, here I brought my first two or three girls, and here I met the woman with whom I at last fell in love and whom, however miserable the outcome of that love, I shall always remember in this setting as she undressed one night in a luminous haze of gaslight and moonbeams before we threw ourselves in ecstasy on one of Mr. Boomhower's straw-stuffed beds. It was the theatre of my youth.

There were those who saw even then that the "Lost Generation," far from being a unified gathering, was closer to a two-tiered society formed of a core of significant writers and artists—Hemingway, Joyce, and Fitzgerald among them—surrounded by a sizable contingent of bartenders, travel companions, and second-rate writers, many of whom are remembered only for having succumbed to the temptation to tell of their days in Montparnasse. T. S. Eliot warned McAlmon that Paris must be viewed as "a place and a tradition, rather than as a congeries of people, who are mostly futile and timewasting, except when you want to pass an evening agreeably in a café. The chief danger about Paris is that it . . . produces a pleasant illusion of great mental activity rather than the solid results of hard work." But hard work was not what most of those gathered in Paris were after. Many of them considered themselves practitioners of art, but a different sort of art from the century before. Malcolm Cowley, describing a visit

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to the Dadaists in Paris, declared, "Really, it is huge fun."

In the end, this idea of "art as fun"—art as a kind of alcoholic binge—is the legacy of the Lost Generation. It is a bequest to which the great writers who formed the nucleus of that larger group would have surely objected, but this has not prevented the notion from becoming the vantage point from which the work of the entire expatriate movement is viewed. The life of F. Scott Fitzgerald is often held forth as an exemplar of artistic capriciousness. Carpenter's description continues in this tradition: "He and Zelda delighted to behave like characters from his own novel, seeking publicity by doing handstands in the Biltmore lobby because Fitzgerald had not been in the news for a week, and riding to parties on the roof of a taxi." Carpenter ignores the fact that Fitzgerald saw his behavior in a much different light. Reflecting on his trip to France in 1926, Fitzgerald recorded in his ledger: "Futile, shameful useless but the $30,000 rewards of 1924 work. Self disgust. Health gone." Throughout his life, Fitzgerald deeply understood that, ultimately, it was not the "gathering of material," but the writing of literature that mattered. "Genius is the ability to put into effect what is in your mind," he once wrote. "There's no other definition of it."

Carpenter fails at the primary task of any meaningful study of the expatriate movement: to get past the legendary escapades to a critical evaluation of the art and literature of the era. Carpenter is not unaware that the expatriates posed more than they produced; it just doesn't bother him. In his conclusion, he writes: "The geniuses had mostly turned out not to be geniuses after all. Yet they had been geniuses at being together, drinking together, sleeping together, and quarrelling together; and that was something worth remembering." From a more discriminating historian this would come as a judgment; from Carpenter it is nothing more than a sheepish apology.

It is fitting that a book which perpetuates such a facile notion of artistic creativity should itself be nothing more than a repackaging of platitudes. That learning about art should be easy is the natural outgrowth of the thought that art is fun, an idea as common in America in the 1980s as it was on the Left Bank in the 1920s. It is the central tenet of the legions of artistic *poseurs* who now jam our coffeehouses, art courses, and writing workshops, as well as of those for whom the occasional museum tour or staged poetry reading constitutes a satisfying dose of culture. Among this large—and largely ignorant—audience, *Geniuses Together* will find its eager readership.

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Notebook

Guns and other "hermeneutical acts" at Columbia

by Roger Kimball

Every now and then one stumbles into a situation where some extreme way of looking at the world is unwittingly summed up or dramatized by a particular individual. What I have in mind are not those rare instances in which a genuinely original thought finds public expression, but the much commoner experience of witnessing a stock response unfold itself in radical rhetoric. In such cases, one may speak of a cliché personified. And one should really be grateful for such performances, for though they are generally unpalatable, they are also unfailingly instructive. It is always worth reminding oneself how intellectually crippling a rote adherence to clichés can be, how much it insulates one from the healthy corrective of common sense and renders one liable to spout the most appalling nonsense.

A perfect example of this sort of thing was on display at Columbia University this winter in a meeting of the university seminar devoted to "Innovations in Education." The seminar, which meets roughly once a month, counts among its regular participants some fifteen or twenty college and high-school administrators, teachers, and professional "educationists." It was only to be expected that sooner or later Allan Bloom's best-selling book *The Closing of the American Mind* would appear on the roster of educational "innovations" to be debated, especially since one persistent theme of the book is the folly of almost everything that goes under the name of "educational innovation." And since I had reviewed the book favorably for *The New York Times Book Review* when it appeared last year, I was invited to the seminar one evening to discuss the book and its reception.

I should say at the outset that I went to the seminar fully aware that Professor Bloom's attack on the current state of higher education in this country had been greeted with unvarnished rage in the academy—a rage made all the more intense by the book's extraordinary success; consequently, I did not imagine I should be addressing Professor Bloom's most ardent supporters. As it happened, the situation at Columbia that evening reminded me of a *New Yorker* cartoon that appeared last year at the height of the book's success: a bookseller, surrounded by piles of *The Closing of the American Mind,* assures a customer, "I haven't read it, but it's excellent." I had not been at the seminar long before I realized that, with a few notable exceptions, my hosts were in an inversely analogous position: they hadn't read it, but they were sure it was a terrible book.

My remarks were brief. I began by sketching Professor Bloom's main argument and emphasizing his opening contention that "*the* question" for anyone concerned with liberal education remains the age-old question "'What is man?' in relation to his highest aspirations as opposed to his low and common needs." "A liberal education," Professor Bloom continues in his introduction,

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"means precisely helping students to pose this question to themselves, to become aware that the answer is neither obvious nor simply unavailable, and that there is no serious life in which this question is not a continuous concern."

Knowing that the term "elitist" continues to strike fear and loathing into the breasts of most educators, I went on to point out that Professor Bloom's position is elitist only in the sense that it holds that the basis of a liberal education is (in Matthew Arnold's phrase) "the best that has been thought and said." He preaches an elitism of achievement, but a democracy of opportunity. In other words, while Bloom insists that a liberal education should focus first and foremost on the cultural masterpieces of Western civilization, when it comes to deciding who should be encouraged to study these masterpieces, his answer is practically Jeffersonian: anyone who has the talent, commitment, and passion necessary for serious study.

For Professor Bloom, one of the most serious impediments to liberal education is the passionless relativism that is so prominent a feature of today's academic ethos. This relativism is based on the unquestioned and pernicious assumption that truth is merely a kind of sociological construct that varies from culture to culture—the paradoxical assumption that the main enemy of truth is an allegiance to Truth. Among much else, it follows from this assumption that the idea of universal cultural masterpieces is also a kind of sociological construct and that, at bottom, there can be no justification for preferring some works to others: since none express uniquely valuable insights, none are inherently more valuable than any others. In describing this situation, Professor Bloom draws upon Nietzsche's harrowing image of the "last man," the man who blithely rejects the claim of ideals like truth or justice for the sake of an undemanding ethic of cultural relativism. In the end, *The Closing of the American Mind* may be seen as a struggle against the triumph of the last man and the spiritual surrender he represents.

It perhaps goes without saying that my presentation of Professor Bloom's argument did not meet with overwhelming approval. In the discussion that followed there was the usual polite back-and-forth of academic debate. One or two of those who took issue with Professor Bloom appeared to have pondered his position, and they offered thoughtful objections or caveats to one or another point I had raised. Some—like the poor woman who went on about Professor Bloom, the scientific revolution, and the evil consequences of adhering to "absolutes" in this enlightened age—clearly hadn't a clue about the contents of the book: such people belonged to that large community who hadn't read the book but still knew it was terrible. And then there was one Frank Moretti, assistant headmaster of the Dalton School, one of the most prestigious and exclusive primary and secondary schools in New York City. Rarely does one encounter a set of radical clichés so consummately personified as in Mr. Moretti.

This representative of the elite educational establishment did not simply take exception to some aspects of Allan Bloom's argument, nor did he see it as a rare conservative voice in a field long dominated by liberal pieties. On the contrary, in Mr. Moretti's view *The Closing of the American Mind* must be regarded as the academic capstone of a conservative (read: "undesirable") trend in recent thinking about education, a trend that began with the dismantling of the open admissions policies that were put into practice in the Sixties. Never mind that open admissions has been widely condemned as disastrous: for Mr. Moretti, it was evidence of the conservative onslaught that it should be discontinued. (I had to wonder, though: does he support "open admissions" for the Dalton School?) Moreover, Mr. Moretti discerned something positively "Hitleresque" (yes, he actually used that word) about Professor Bloom's book, something oppressive and deeply anti-democratic about its invocation of the authority of tradition. Nor was that all. When someone raised a question about Professor Bloom's discussion of the

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Platonic doctrine of *eros,* Mr. Moretti informed us that he—Professor Bloom—was "obsessed with sex."

I believe it was at this juncture that Mr. Moretti definitively stepped over the line between being merely provocatively hostile and being completely out of touch with reality. At any rate, he proceeded to provide his audience with a good indication of the level of his own meditations on the erotic when he derisively castigated Professor Bloom for describing sublimation as a virtue. Indeed, though sublimation (as any teacher will attest) is a prerequisite for education, it was obviously a dirty word for Mr. Moretti. One can guess at the contempt he would shower upon the contention that sublimation is a "conspicuous feature of cultural development; it is what makes it possible for higher psychical activities, scientific, artistic or ideological, to play such an important part in civilized life"—until, at least, he learned that this passage comes from *Civilization and Its Discontents,* not *The Closing of the American Mind.* Though perhaps Mr. Moretti regards Freud, too, as "Hitleresque" insofar as he insists on the civilizing function of sublimation. Or is it simply that he prefers the polymorphous perversity championed by Norman O. Brown, Herbert Marcuse, and company?

This wasn't the occasion to inquire, for Mr. Moretti had even more piquant insights about *The Closing of the American Mind* to share with us. Near the end of the session, someone read aloud the following passage from the concluding pages of the book:

> The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers, that is, in principle, of all men to the extent that they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good.

Wasn't this evidence of the essentially democratic nature of Bloom's vision of liberal education, the speaker wondered? Not according to Mr. Moretti, who saw in these remarks the rudiments of an argument for . . . well, for *slavery.* (That was the one thing you could be sure Mr. Moretti knew about fifth-century Athens: that it condoned slavery.)

You might think that Mr. Moretti could go no further, that sooner or later he must return to earth. Perhaps on Monday mornings, when he heads off to the Dalton school, he does; but he was still in orbit this evening. When someone brought up Professor Bloom's description of the upheaval at Cornell University in 1969—the upheaval, remember, when gun-toting black students intimidated fellow students and faculty alike, holding people hostage and occupying buildings by force—Mr. Moretti was ready with his *pièce de résistance.* It is a narrow-minded mistake to think that the meaning of a gun was clear in that situation, Mr. Moretti told us; far from being an act of criminal intimidation—which is how I have always interpreted it—those gun-toting students must be seen as having engaged in a noble "hermeneutical act" that cannot be judged by normal bourgeois standards of propriety.

A "hermeneutical act"? So that's what those guns at Cornell meant! I wonder if Mr. Moretti encourages his students to engage in kindred "hermeneutical acts" at the Dalton School? What would his fellow teachers think of the idea? Or his students' parents? Or his Board of Trustees? Is that the sort of "interpretation" that the Dalton School stands for? No doubt Mr. Moretti deigns to serve as assistant headmaster at such a tony educational institution because it helps him make the contradictions inherent in our oppressive society more manifest. But what does it mean that he should so carelessly throw around terms like "Hitleresque" and "slavery"? Is such intellectual irresponsibility the result of the liberation he espouses as an alternative to *The Closing of the American Mind*? Educational innovation can mean many different things. For Mr. Moretti, unfortunately, it has nothing to do with genuine learning or the pursuit of truth.

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Open house at the Pollocks

by Deborah Solomon

Next month, hundreds of people will descend on East Hampton, Long Island, to celebrate the opening of a most unusual museum. An art museum it certainly isn't, since it doesn't have any art to speak of. Nor does it have stately quarters, occupying as it does an ordinary farmhouse with weathered brown shingles and a sagging front porch. What sets the house apart from the others lining Fireplace Road is an accident of history: Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner once lived here. The Pollock-Krasner House and Study Center—the first home of twentieth-century artists to be granted landmark status—offers us the chance to wander around their place and see how they lived.

Whose idea was this? Partly Lee Krasner's. When she died in 1984, she stipulated in her will that her home in the Hamptons be turned into a museum and study center—and she offered to donate it to any non-profit group interested in taking it over. But she didn't leave a single cent of her twenty-million-dollar fortune to help the project along. This struck many people as puzzling. Why would a woman known for her business savvy specifically designate her house a museum yet withhold the funds necessary to guarantee its survival over time?

A couple of theories have been proposed. It was said that Krasner was testing the loyalty of the residents of East Hampton: she felt they'd been slow to appreciate her achievements during her lifetime, but hoped they'd step forward after her death to preserve her memory. A second and more plausible theory holds just the opposite: Krasner feared if she endowed the house with a sizable bequest, the town of East Hampton would hastily agree to take the place over, but then let it molder amid bureaucratic neglect. For all her millions, Krasner always harbored the bohemian's distrust of wealth. She apparently believed that only by leaving her house without a dowry could she hope to attract an honorable suitor who would tend to matters of restoration and preservation out of devotion alone.

But devotion in itself is hardly enough to run a museum, let alone to empower it with a sense of purpose and vision. As much as one would like to report that the Stony Brook Foundation, the non-profit arm of Stony Brook University which took over the house last year, has more to offer than good intentions, unfortunately that's just not the case. To be sure, Stony Brook has made every effort to imbue its undertaking with a sense of high purpose, dutifully assembling a dozen professors from different departments into a group known as the Academic Committee and charging them with the task of planning an ongoing series of public events to be held at the house. Yet among the many ironies surrounding the project is that the Pollock House may well be the first museum whose holdings consist, well, of nothing.

The restoration of an artist's house can be approached in any one of a number of ways,

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and the strategy that Stony Brook has adopted is decidedly low-key. Virtually no attempt has been made to re-create how the house looked in the eleven years when Pollock lived here. Unlike the home of, say, Frederic Church near Hudson, New York, or Thomas Hart Benton in Kansas City, the Pollock House isn't the sort of historical site where one can find room after room of interesting belongings that give you some sense of the man. When Pollock died in 1956, Krasner promptly disposed of his possessions, and about all that remains of him in the house are some dusty, yellowed books and a collection of three hundred or so jazz records. These are not exactly major holdings, and Stony Brook is aware of that. So instead of trying to generate interest where none exists, it has decided to do nothing to the interior of the house. The school might have tried to borrow back some of Pollock's or Krasner's artwork, but why bother? The presumption is that Pollock's house is of interest simply because he lived here.

While there's essentially nothing to be seen in the house—unless you happen to have an interest in functional furniture acquired second-hand, or in paintings by one of Krasner's nephews—the barn on the property is another story. The quaint little barn, which served as Pollock's studio, has lately been the subject of reams of publicity. Earlier this year, a team of conservators led by Meg Perlman, an art historian and director of the Pollock House, ripped up a layer of Masonite panels with which Pollock had insulated the floor of the barn toward the end of his life. The excavation revealed a relic from ancient times: the barn's original floor, with a dense encrustation spreading twenty feet square of drips and splatters that had accumulated while Pollock was working. Eureka! Newspapers rushed to report the discovery, *Vanity Fair* secured exclusive rights to reproduce pictures of it, and eager academics scampered to East Hampton in hope of being the lucky first to reconstruct (or should I say deconstruct?) the floor's history. There is, I think, an element of comedy in the notion of scholars reduced to garbagolists, poring over the artist's floor in an attempt to decode its convoluted network of dribbles and drippings.

The excitement generated by the "Found Floor," as *The New York Times* called it, alerted the folks at Stony Brook to the barn's potential as a source of entertainment, and plans were drawn up to maximize its popular appeal. When the Pollock House opens next month, the barn will be the centerpiece of the site—complete with a plexiglass walkway along the perimeter of the floor. Visitors will be encouraged to amble along the plastic path, examining the floor from every angle and contemplating its random splashes and splatters as if each one constituted a singular clue to the puzzle of creativity. Of course it is entirely possible that some of these visitors may never have seen a Pollock painting, but not to worry; reproductions of the artist's work, as well as blown-up photos of Pollock himself, will be hanging in the barn. None of the reproductions had yet been installed at the time of my visit last winter, so I won't try to judge them, except to say that Pollock's work reproduces poorly; it loses both the scale and texture essential to even the most casual understanding of it. Hanging reproductions inside the barn for the purpose of instruction makes about as much sense as assigning students in an English class to read Monarch notes.

But one doesn't want to get too cynical here. If you're at all a sentimental person (and who isn't when it comes to Pollock?) it is not uninteresting to wander around his property even if there's not much to see. The barn, in particular, I found moving. It was the scene of Pollock's rise to eminence, but also of his sad decline. If the barn was his refuge, it was his prison, too, the isolated cell where he spent his last years trapped amid doubt and failure. But one wonders what hint of struggle will remain once Stony Brook has finished its renovations to the barn. All eyes will be focused on the famous floor, following its markings and movements like a series of dance steps tapped out in a moment of ease.

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For all the drama the barn provides, the folks at Stony Brook apparently decided that something more than simple theater was needed to justify the existence of the Pollock House. What they had in mind was something scholarly, or something that at least sounded scholarly, a project that would leave no question in anyone's mind that the Pollock House is every bit as venerable an institution as the university with which it is affiliated. Meg Perlman conceived the idea of converting an empty shed on the property into a study center whose purpose is twofold: to run an oral history project devoted to videotaped interviews with anyone and everyone who ever met the Pollocks; and to collect information about the East Hampton art scene.

A video library in Pollock's house? Given all the information already available about Pollock and Krasner, one might instinctively recoil at the prospect of miles and miles of unedited electronic tape replaying the same old stories. But Meg Perlman is very much a child of the electronic age. She believes that video is a medium in the fullest sense, capable of communing with the dead—and not just with Pollock, but with every artist who ever lived and painted on the southern fork of Long Island. Her ultimate goal, she told me in a recent interview, "is to make a Channel Thirteen-type film on the East End and what it's meant to artists from Chase and Moran all the way to Pollock."

To be sure, many artists have lived in the Hamptons over the past century, and the area can be said to represent, much like Provincetown or Woodstock, an interesting chapter in American cultural history. But to the Academic Committee at Stony Brook, it also represents a legitimate chapter in art history. Among the goals of the Pollock House and Study Center is to examine the artist's achievements in the context of East Hampton and to trace the lineage—or rather to invent a lineage—connecting a landscape painter like Thomas Moran to someone very different, namely Pollock, who up until now has been seen, and rightly so, as an urban painter. For many he evokes life on Eighth Street in a cold-water flat, Saturdays on Fifty-seventh Street checking out the galleries, evenings in cafeterias and Village bars, idle afternoons in Washington Square Park—the whole spectacle of bohemia's final flourish in New York. But that's likely to change. The public unveiling of Pollock's house, coupled with a program of activities devoted to the study of Long Island painting, will no doubt give rise to a new view of Pollock, one which would have us believe that he was essentially a country chap whose work derived from his rustic surroundings in East Hampton.

Of course there's no way to prove or disprove such a notion, but that doesn't make it unworthy of consideration. And given that we're likely to hear quite a bit in coming years about the subject of "How East Hampton Influenced Pollock"—and to hear it promoted by an institution with a vested interest in establishing this approach to Pollock's work as the dominant one—perhaps it's worthwhile to consider the matter right here. What, exactly, was Pollock's relationship to his surroundings? Can it be said that living in East Hampton, with its flat, tranquil land and open spaces, had any effect on his work?

To construct an argument claiming that it did wouldn't take a brilliant mind. One could certainly use as evidence an intriguing little fact that has so far remained absent from discussions of Pollock's work and that is this: while *Cathedral, Enchanted Forest,* and almost all of Pollock's other early drip paintings occupy a vertical canvas, his later drip paintings—from 1948 on—tend to be horizontal. They also tend to be larger. If a vertical painting evokes the human figure, then a horizontal one could evoke the horizon or landscape.

And it wasn't just the format of his paintings that changed, but their mood as well. The dense, claustrophobic, heavily impastoed surfaces of his early drip paintings eventually gave way to an open, airy lyricism, as if his art had taken a step out-of-doors. So yes, it is possible to make the case that Pollock's transition from a work such as *Cathedral*

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(1947), a vertical drip painting with intimations of heads and figures, to *One* (1950), an eighteen-foot-long panoramic sweep of linear rhythms, shows him rejecting the teeming, human spaces of the city and yielding wholeheartedly to the light and scale of the East Hampton landscape.

But why would anyone with a shred of honesty want to make such an argument? To place Pollock's work within the tradition of landscape painting is to miss the role of imagination in his work, and to miss that is to miss everything interesting about him. Pollock's vision was way too big to be defined by a particular town or setting, and he simply wasn't the kind of painter to indulge in what Wallace Stevens once called the "intercourse" between imagination and reality. His absorption was in selfhood and it was complete. To say that Pollock was a member of the School of East Hampton as opposed to the School of New York—and that is the message now emanating from Pollock headquarters on Accabonac Creek—is to distort his achievement, as well as to enhance his popular image as a noble savage. It's a trivialization of the man and his art that ranks right up there with Harold Rosenberg drafting Pollock into his private cadre of action painters, or with the image of the artist as a Jungian illustrator that was proposed about a decade ago by overzealous academics in pursuit of tenured positions.

Besides serving as a center of research, the Pollock House will also be the setting for an ongoing series of "academic" events organized by the professors on the Academic Committee at Stony Brook and open to the public. Two events have been planned for this summer, the first a series of jazz concerts "that relate to Pollock's collection of jazz records," according to Meg Perlman; and the second a lecture by Robert Hughes, the art critic for *Time* magazine. The notion that these events will serve to further scholarship is, of course, hilarious—next we'll be hearing that a conference has been planned at which visitors will be able to sample the kind of beer and whiskey favored by Pollock—though, I admit, I feel a little like a spoilsport in questioning their value. How could one possibly object to a group of people sitting on the grass on a summer day listening to jazz, or hearing Hughes reminisce about his friendship with Krasner? Aren't these events innocuous?

I don't think they are, not if you see them as emblematic of the groupie mentality governing every aspect of the Pollock House. Jazz concerts, videotapes, blown-up photographs of the artist—they're all slick gears in the now familiar celebrity machinery, a multi-media processing that elevates individuals to the ranks of stardom while separating them from the context of their achievements. Listening to jazz in Pollock's backyard can no more enhance our sense of the artist than browsing in trendy boutiques in East Hampton or driving its traffic-clogged streets can put us in touch with what the town was like when it was still a quiet, offbeat retreat where houses could be purchased for five thousand dollars (as Pollock's was) and piped hot water was considered a luxury (he couldn't afford it). The Pollock House presumes to be a monument to Pollock and Krasner and their times. But it's really a monument to our own.

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Detail, Abraham's Farewell To Ishmael, 1987

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Letters

The Met Portfolio Tours

To the Editors:

I am writing to express my disappointment in Eric Gibson's commentary, "Talk Shows at the Met," in the November 1987 issue. Although I appreciate and share Mr. Gibson's strong negative reaction to hype, I cannot accept his blanket rejection of museum education in general. His assertion that "the museum's desire to inform its visitors needs to be balanced against the more compelling need to allow the work of art to speak for itself" is correct, but his subsequent comments reveal a general lack of understanding for the complexities of this task. Despite his self-righteous critique of the Met's appeal to money-eyed audiences—his assertion that the Portfolio tours are very expensive is actually based on incorrect information since the tours cost $20 for the set of four tours, including admission, and are therefore quite a bargain at $1 per tour—an old-fashioned elitist bias underlies his reasoning. I sense that at heart Mr. Gibson believes that works of art can and should talk for themselves and that he longs for that time when museums were the quiet, sparsely populated enclaves of the enlightened few who knew how to hold discourse with the silent masterpieces on display.

Those of us who work in the museum profession are often discouraged by the gargantuan task of educating the public and sometimes fall back ourselves on nostalgic reverie, but we have had to come to a very different set of conclusions. It helps to put the problem in a broader perspective. First, works of art are inanimate objects. They are mere things, devoid of any intrinsic value or meaning outside of those values and meanings assigned to them by human beings—makers and consumers of art. They cannot, in and of themselves, communicate anything significant to anyone who does not speak their language. Second, the overwhelming majority of people who visit museums do not speak this language.

We live in a culture that depends on words and on the information they convey. This kind of information has been described by anthropologist Edward T. Hall, in his book *Beyond Culture* (Anchor Books, 1977), as "low-context" information because, once the code is known, it requires little previous experience to be understood. Art objects, on the other hand, are high-context forms of communication. They convey complex ideas which go well beyond the immediately visible, easily decipherable stories that some paintings depict. Hall defines a high-context communication as "one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message." To make sense out of the confrontation with an original object the viewer has to be willing to question, analyze, and think critically—that is, to be able to make educated decisions and judgments about what he or she is seeing.

People who have little or no experience with art generally prefer art that tells a story because it resembles the low-context information they are accustomed to absorbing. Because they only know to use vision instrumentally rather than contemplatively, they expect readily accessible

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meanings from art objects. They feel baffled and frustrated when this does not happen. Low-context information in the museum setting, anecdotes relating to the history of an object or its maker, serves the important and primary task of calming the fears that many people feel when confronted with an object that clearly does not speak their language. Low-context information cannot translate the high-context experience of looking at art, but it's an inevitable first step.

While I agree with Mr. Gibson's criticism of the superficiality of the content in many recorded tours, I take strong issue with his assertion that such tours "are counterproductive in any form." Recorded tours, unlike labels, allow you to use your eyes to look at the object while taking in information. The correct content, and by this I mean information stated in such a way as to help visitors make sense of what is in front of their eyes without giving the impression that such a brief encounter is all there is to understanding art, can both instruct and serve the more important function of diffusing the visitors' insecurity in front of objects, thus enabling them to be more open and relaxed and to begin experiencing art more fully for themselves.

The Met's Portfolio Tours do a number of things very well. They are a clever way to solve a problem endemic to museums in recent decades: how to get visitors to look at the permanent collections instead of only coming for the special exhibitions. By taking the "special event" idea and applying it to the permanent collection, the Portfolio Tours make good use of popular psychology. In addition, the idea of using narrators who do not have a background in art history is a good one because it encourages people to see that art can be approached from a variety of different points of view. While it is quite easy to think of ways in which the Portfolio Tours could be improved, both in content and in format—why not celebrities that a larger variety of minorities and ethnic groups can relate to, for example?—the Metropolitan ought to be commended for its ingenious experiment. Mr. Gibson's article fails to give credit where it is due.

Danielle Rice
Curator of Education
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Eric Gibson replies:

How sad that the Curator of Education at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in a discussion of the art museum and its public, should attempt to take refuge in a ploy that is now as commonplace as it is contemptible—the charge of elitism. This charge is normally leveled by those who can't be bothered to formulate a proper counter-argument to ideas they find objectionable. Miss Rice does at least manage a response to my article. So it is all the more disheartening to see her, a curator of education, resorting to such a base rhetorical trick. It is particularly offensive in this case in being the result of a misrepresentation—or is it only a misreading?—of my article on the "AT&T Portfolio Tours" at the Met. There was in fact nothing in my article that called for a "blanket rejection of museum education." How could there have been when I acknowledged that we all need to know what we're looking at? There was also nothing in my article that frowned upon large numbers of people going to our art museums. I objected to recorded tours in general and to the AT&T tours in particular because I do not believe that they serve the purposes of education. They automatically relegate the work of art to a secondary or background status, and they are in any case mostly mush—the kind of mush that substitutes storytelling for the kind of instruction that might assist a visitor to look at a work of art *as* a work of art. Rice's defense of these meretricious tapes suggests that she herself is hostage to this view. Certainly the word "aesthetic" is conspicuously absent from her letter. Does she really believe that an education in art is possible in isolation from aesthetic concerns? Her letter would seem to suggest that she does.

And what an awful place it makes the art museum out to be! Visitors, she says, "feel baffled and frustrated." They are said to be in need of something capable of "calming [their] fears" and of "diffusing [their] insecurity." And what a really degraded view of art is described in this letter! It is seen to be nothing but "inanimate objects . . . mere things" that can only be brought to life by "words." And what words! "Low-context," "high-context" . . . "Art objects [as] . . . high-context forms of communication." Language of this sort is guaranteed to destroy the experience of art, not only because it is ugly in

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itself but because its message is so mistaken in suggesting that what is important in a work of art comes from something outside the work of art itself. Art, in Rice's view, is so radically dependent upon words that it has no life of its own. With friends like this, the work of art needs no enemies.

It is no secret, in any case, what is meant here by "low-context information." It means television. What the Curator of Education at the Philadelphia Museum of Art is really saying is that because this is what the public is used to, this is what they should be given in a museum. She is hardly alone in this view, to be sure. Serious subjects of all kinds—current events, history, literature, and the other arts—are regularly reduced to this sort of mush entertainment. But if this is all that the education department of a major museum can offer its public, why should the public even be persuaded to come to the museum? They can save time and money by staying home with the tube.

The horror, of course, is that programs of this sort seriously reduce the public's capacity to look at and think critically about what there is to see in an art museum—the art! Perhaps I was lucky, for when I was a teenager and first introduced to art, I had a teacher who showed a slide of a Modigliani and told us that in painting his nude figure the artist had avoided using any straight lines. It wasn't everything one needed to know about Modigliani, nor was it meant to be. But it was a revelation, all the same. By addressing himself to *aesthetic* matters, my teacher gave me something that helped to unlock not just the mysteries of this particular picture but of others as well. In offering a guided tour of its collection, the Met has the same task—and the same responsibility—for as Rice herself points out, "the overwhelming majority of people who visit museums do not speak the language of art." What she seems to have forgotten, or has never known, is that the language of art is an aesthetic language—and that is not a language that Walter Cronkite is in a position to illuminate. If Danielle Rice doesn't know that, she doesn't know something essential to the mission of museum education. As for the Met's "AT&T Portfolio Tours"—to which, by the way, Mayor Koch of New York has now added another celebrity tape—it is as if a great library were to offer its readers and potential readers only comic books and television adaptations instead of the books themselves. Haven't we the right to expect something better than that from a great museum?

Once upon a time we could, thanks to a booklet entitled *How to Look at Paintings* published by the Met in 1959 and available in the museum bookstore until the late Seventies. Like the "AT&T Portfolio Tours," it had the neophyte visitor in mind, but how different it was in substance and effect! Although the booklet was subtitled "A Guide For Children," adults had a lot to gain by reading it as well. Eight of the museum's paintings were reproduced, accompanied by brief one-hundred-and-fifty-word commentaries that served as superb introductions to what artists do and to the act of looking. For example, in Chardin's *Blowing Bubbles,* in which a young man leans over a parapet blowing soap bubbles, with a tumbler and part of a companion's face visible near him, the reader is invited to find a triangle, a sphere, and other shapes—generalized silhouettes of the major masses in the picture. It probably sounds simplistic in the description, and it certainly lacks the sort of "sexiness" that marketing people find *de rigueur* nowadays. Yet anyone reading those short commentaries learned more about the paintings, and about looking at all painting, than any number of specious celebrity tapes could teach them today. The disparity between *How to Look at Paintings* and the "AT&T Portfolio Tours" tells us more about what's happening in museums today than anything else could.

I was wrong about the price of the Portfolio Tour tapes, but even at the correct price, *caveat emptor.*

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françois rouan

Etude pour son pied, la route, 1986. Wax encaustic on paper, 42½ × 29 inches (108 × 74 cm.)

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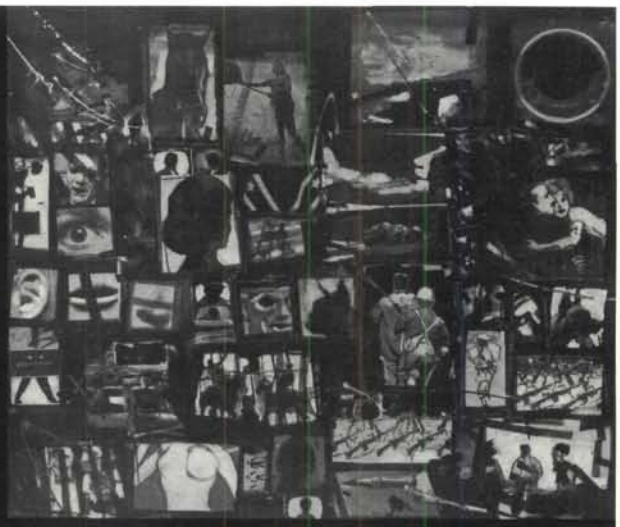

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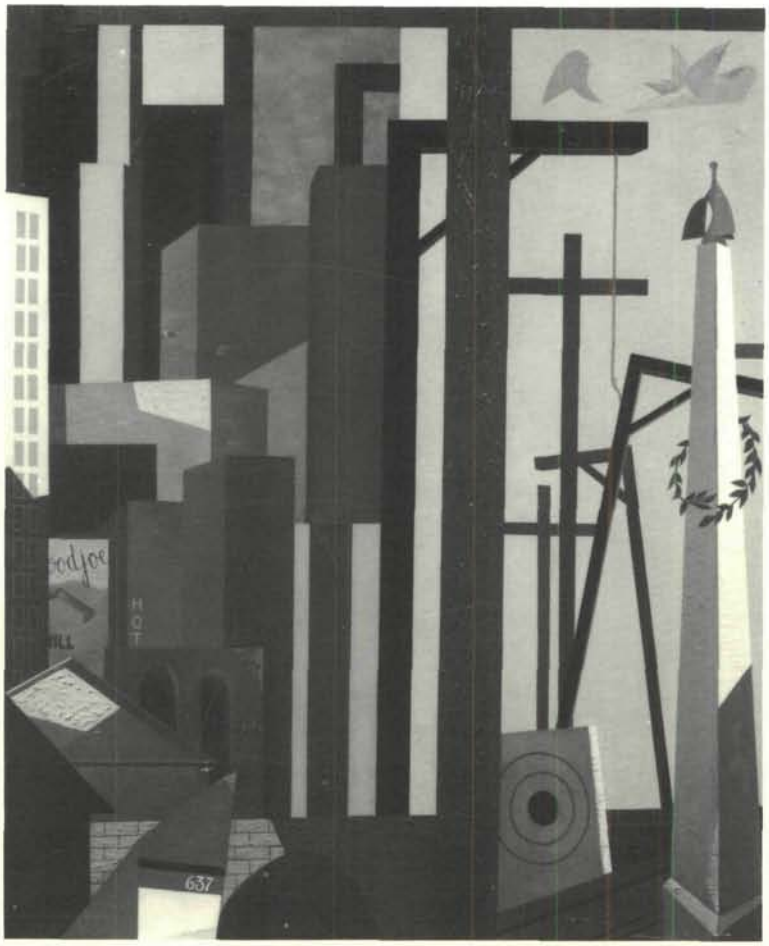

Solitudes, 1946, oil on canvas, 44 x 36 inches

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